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Richard Wagner

Francis Hueffer (1845–89) was born and studied music in Germany, but moved to London in 1869 to pursue a career as a critic and writer on music. He edited the series 'The Great Musicians' for Novello and Co., was music critic of *The Times*, wrote libretti for some now-forgotten operas, and was an early advocate and interpreter to the British of Wagner. Between his *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future* (1874) and his translation of the correspondence of Wagner and Liszt (1888), he wrote Wagner in his own 'Great Musicians' series in 1881 (two years before the composer's death). The book surveys Wagner's life and his musical writings, and a separate chapter is devoted to each of the operas (except *Parsifal*, which was not performed until 1882). This is a fascinating contemporary assessment of the standard-bearer of the 'music of the future'.

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THE GREAT MUSICIANS

RICHARD WAGNER

The Great Musicians

Edited by FRANCIS HUEFFER

RICHARD WAGNER

BY THE EDITOR

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RICHARD WAGNER.

GERMANS are fond of establishing an antithesis between "talent" and "character," between a man of genius and a man of action. Seldom, it is true, the two go together. Few of the great thinkers and poets of the world have lived an active life in the ordinary sense. Even dramatists, although by the very essence of their genius dependent on the events of history and daily life, are not generally an exception to this rule. Like Fielding's poet, they regard it as their "business to record great actions and not to do them." This is different with Wagner. He is emphatically "a man of action"—of action restless, and extending over many branches of thought and feeling. He has heard the roar of cannon and musketry on and off the stage, and the shouts of excited mobs are no less known, although less familiar, to him than the sedate applause of audiences in concert-hall and theatre. A story might be told of him very different from the ordinary summary of an artist's life-time: "He was born, took a wife, and

died." One day, no doubt, it will be told by himself, if not by others. But in the mean time the materials for his biography are scanty, and of comparatively little interest. A few dates furnished by himself on various occasions form a small stock of facts of which the numerous so-called biographies in German, English, and French, are more or less florid transcriptions. But ever so many variations, with ever so many sharps and flats of praise and vituperation, cannot add a single bar to the original theme. The following dates of Wagner's life ought therefore to be regarded as no more than so many landmarks in his artistic career. The really important incidents of his life, interwoven as they are with the fate of other living persons, must for the present remain untold.

Richard Wagner was born at Leipsic in Saxony, on May 22, 1813. The Norn, he says himself, the goddess of fate in Scandinavian mythology; deposited on his cradle "the never contented spirit that ever seeks the new;" a gift of vital importance for his future life. But this, of course, is allegory. In plain truth, his cradle stood in an ordinary nursery, well protected from Norns and other heathen deities. Wagner's family belonged to the middle class. His father held a small municipal appointment, and must have been a man of some culture, as may be gathered from the fact that, during the French occupation of Leipsic, he alone, amongst his colleagues, was able to converse fluently with the strangers. After his death, in the year of our composer's birth, his widow married an actor, afterwards a portrait-painter, of the

name of Geyer. His influence on Wagner cannot have been of a lasting kind, seeing that he also died before the boy had completed his seventh year. But he is the first connecting link between Wagner and the stage, which was to become the scene of most of his troubles and triumphs. At one time it was Geyer's intention to bring up his step-son to the profession of painter, but Wagner proved a clumsy pupil. At a later period, the idea seems to have dawned upon him of a possibility of musical genius in the boy. "Shortly before his death," Wagner says, "I had mastered the 'Yungfern Kranz,' from 'Der Freischütz,' at that time a novelty, on the piano. The day before he died I had to play it to him in the next room ; after I had finished I heard him say to my mother in his weak voice, 'Should he have talent for music ?'" In the old Icelandic sagas the gift of prophecy conveyed in the moment of death is a common feature, and it is perhaps for that reason that Wagner has preserved the touching little story.

Another anecdote, and we have done with Herr Geyer. The source is again the short autobiographical sketch written by Wagner in 1842. "The day after my step-father died my mother came into the nursery and said something from him to every child. To me she said, 'Of you he wanted to make something.' I remember," Wagner adds, "that for a long time I had an idea that something might become of me."

At first, certainly, there seemed to be little cause for this idea. At the age of nine Wagner entered the Kreuzschule at Dresden, where the family were then living,

but his studies do not appear to have been over-successful. He lacked application. Too many interests divided his attention. Greek, Latin, mythology, and ancient history he mentions as his favourite subjects. In addition to this he took lessons on the pianoforte, and played overtures and other pieces by the ear. But he refused to practice, and soon his master gave him up as hopeless. "He was right," Wagner confesses; "I have never learned to play the piano to this day." Wagner is a virtuoso on the orchestra, and there is a touch of contempt for the supplementary keyed instrument in this confession. In the mean time, the boy set up for a poet on the largest scale. His study of Greek, and a slight smattering of English which he acquired for the purpose of reading Shakespeare in the original, enabled him to choose his models in the right quarter. A tremendous tragedy was the result; "a kind of compound of 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear,'" Wagner calls it. "The design," he adds, "was grand in the extreme. Forty-two persons died in the course of the piece, and want of living characters compelled me to let most of them reappear as ghosts in the last act." He was eleven at the time; the gift of the Norn was bearing early fruit. But this was not all. Wagner had an opportunity of witnessing a performance of Goethe's 'Egmont' with the incidental music by Beethoven, and immediately he decided that his tragedy also must have a musical accompaniment—to be supplied by himself it need hardly be added. He was ignorant of the rudiments of the art, but that slight deficiency might, he thought, be got over in no time. All this may seem

very childish and absurd, but the child is father to the man, and it is certainly not without importance, that the proclaimer of the poetic foundation of the art of sound should have discovered his own musical gift through his poetic or—more significantly still—through his dramatic requirements.

The most important result of these wild attempts was the commencement of some serious musical studies, which, although carried on in an irregular and somewhat spasmodic fashion, ultimately led to perfect technical mastership. One of his immature productions, “the climax of my nonsensicalities,” as he himself calls it, an overture of gigantic proportions, was once performed, but produced nothing but merriment on the part of unappreciative contemporaries, much to the mortification of the young titan, as may be imagined. But in spite of this disappointment, and in spite of the advice of family and friends, who naturally looked upon his proceedings with some suspicion, Wagner adhered to his musical vocation, and the more serious turn his studies took after, and no doubt partly in consequence of, the events recorded, is sufficiently indicated by the testimony of one of Wagner’s early friends, now, by the way, his bitterest opponent. “I am doubtful,” Heinrich Dorn writes in 1832, “whether there ever was a young musician more familiar with the works of Beethoven than Wagner at eighteen. He possessed most of the master’s overtures and large instrumental pieces in copies made by himself. He went to bed with the sonatas, and rose again with the quartets. He sang the songs and whistled the concerti, for with

pianoforte-playing he did not get on very well ; in brief, there was in him a regular furor Teutonicus, which, combined with considerable scientific culture and an extraordinary activity of mind, promised powerful shoots."

His entrance into practical musical life Wagner made as conductor of a small operatic troupe at Magdeburg ; and in 1839 we find him as leader of a similar institution at Riga, married to an actress, pressed for money, and altogether dissatisfied with his position, pecuniary, social, and artistic. The only results of the preceding epoch were an opera unsuccessfully performed at Magdeburg, and considerable experience as an orchestral leader, acquired whilst rehearsing with mediocre bands and bad singers the motley repertoires of small provincial theatres. At last he resolved upon change,—change at any price, and by means intensely characteristic of his undauntable courage and energy. The "open sesame" to the world's fame and riches was to be a grand opera, 'Rienzi,' the subject taken from Lord Lytton's novel, and conceived during the dreary days at Riga, but destined for no less a theatre than the Grand Opera in Paris, at that time the first lyrical stage of the world. The question was, how to enter that somewhat exclusive precinct. A letter to Scribe, proposing a translation of 'Rienzi,' with the additional condition of getting it accepted at the opera, naturally was without result ; but, nothing daunted, Wagner himself set out for Paris to see what personal solicitation would do.

After having finished the whole poem, and the music to the first two acts, he embarked with his wife on

board a sailing vessel, which was to take him to London, *en route* for Paris. The journey was long and unfavourable; they were driven out of their course, and once during a storm the captain had to seek shelter in a Norwegian port. After nearly a month they reached at last their destination, remained a short time in London, and continued their journey. In the autumn of 1839 Wagner arrived at Paris, with introductions from Meyerbeer to theatrical managers, and full of hopes of seeing his work performed. One almost shudders to think of the fatal consequences which a great success might have had on Wagner's creative power. Perhaps he would have been content with the honour of sharing with Meyerbeer the lucrative laurels of a European reputation. Luckily for himself and his art, Fortune handled him with all the relentless cruelty which she seems to reserve especially for the children of genius. His visit to Paris proved an utter failure. All his attempts at testing the vitality of his work by the ordeal of a performance before the critical French audience were in vain. In order to earn a scanty livelihood he had to undergo the most humiliating trials of musical drudgery; and even in this way he narrowly escaped the death from starvation which he described with grim humour in his novelette, 'The End of a Musician in Paris.' We may consider it the most irrefutable test of Wagner's real genius that he did not perish under this weight of misery and sorrow. It was the original longing of his nature for the purer aims of art that broke into the night of his despair, and taught him now, when every hope of

worldly success had vanished, to seek refuge in the joy of creation which is regardless of ephemeral applause.

Again the tide of despair was rising higher and higher, again something must be done, and was done, by Wagner to stem its destructive progress ; but in what he did, and in how he did it, we see the process of purification which Wagner's artistic character had undergone during this second trial of "hope deferred." 'Rienzi,' as was said before, was written entirely with a view to outward success, to which the higher demands of art were to a great extent sacrificed ; in the work which Wagner now began he scarcely hoped or even wished for this success. It was conceived and written entirely to supply a demand of his own nature — the demand that is of pouring out the anxieties and troubles of his heart in his song. In this way music gave him help and comfort in his supreme need. The work referred to is 'The Flying Dutchman.' It was conceived during the eventful voyage to London ; the music was written at Meudon, where Wagner had retired from Paris in the Spring of 1841.

'Rienzi,' finished in November, 1840, concludes the first period of Wagner's career. It was the time of his violent struggle for notoriety and self-assertion, without regard for the artistic purity of the means applied. The mode of his expression was confined to the forms of the French Grand Opera as established by Spontini, Meyerbeer, and others ; hence this period may be described as his "operatic period." With 'The Flying Dutchman' Wagner enters a new stage of

development. Henceforth he disregards the requirements of vulgar taste, or tastelessness. His works become the immediate effusion of his poetical inspiration, to which the forms of absolute music have gradually to give way.

Ultimately he throws the whole apparatus of the opera, with its empty display of vocal skill and scenic *spectacle*, overboard. Even the name becomes odious to him, and he carefully avoids it in his later works. For the full appreciation of his vast schemes he looks to those to come rather than to the living generation. Hence the sobriquet, invented by his adversaries and adopted by him—"The Music of the Future." A close analysis of the ideas and principles comprised in this name must be deferred for a little while. In 'The Flying Dutchman' these new tendencies appear as yet in an all but embryonic state: only one circumstance may be pointed out in connection with it—Wagner's adversaries boldly assert that his reformatory deeds were the result of previous deliberate speculation, although the comparative dates of his dramatic and his theoretical works clearly show the contrary. If a further proof of the spontaneity of his efforts were required his mode of conceiving 'The Flying Dutchman' would furnish it; for it was only the symbolic representation of his own personal sufferings at the time. Friendless and loveless amongst strangers, he could realize but too well the type of his hero, who, doomed to roam on the wild waves of the ocean, longs for home and the redeeming love of woman. This intensely subjective character of his poetry he involuntarily transferred to his music, and

was thus ultimately led to the breaking of forms insufficient to contain his impassioned utterances.

In the mean time his worldly prospects had undergone an unexpected favourable change. His 'Rienzi' had been accepted for performance at the Dresden theatre, and in 1842 Wagner left Paris for that city in order to prepare his work for the stage. The first performance took place in October of the same year, and its brilliant success led to the composer's engagement as conductor of the Royal Opera at Dresden.

Wagner at the present moment looks back upon 'Rienzi' as a sin of his youth, and judges it with a severity which few impartial outsiders will be prepared to share. It is quite true that 'Rienzi' is not an original work in the highest sense. It was finished before the composer had reached his thirtieth year, and the drastic effects of Spontini and Meyerbeer, and the soft cadenzas of Bellini and Rossini were too tempting to be resisted. In consequence there is much in 'Rienzi' that is more effective than new, and a little that is absolutely bad, or at least immature, for Wagner's development was not precocious like Mozart's or Schubert's. By the side of great weaknesses there are, however, as many passages of great melodious beauty—for instance, the chorus and solo of peace messengers, and Rienzi's "prayer," and specimens of choral structure as grand almost as anything achieved in his later works by Wagner. Of this he himself is, no doubt, well aware, and it is absurd to say that he "repudiates" his early work, much as he may deprecate the principle on which it is constructed. At the Albert Hall con-

certs in 1877, conducted by the composer himself, extracts from 'Rienzi' were found side by side with representative specimens of his later period. The plot of 'Rienzi,' as was said before, has been taken from Bulwer's well-known novel, which Wagner follows with slight modifications. Here, also, good and bad appear in singular juxtaposition. The librettist not having as yet developed into the poet has thought it unnecessary to bestow much care upon diction and metre. On the other hand, the arrangements of the scenes and the exposition of the story evince dramatic instinct of no common order. Great power of conception also is shown in the character of the Tribune, who is drawn after a stronger original than Bulwer's sentimental hero could supply. We have here the historical Rienzi, the hope of Italy and Rome, "Un signor valoroso, accorto, e saggio," as his friend Petrarch calls him. Round the central figure the simple incidents of the plot are arranged in massive groups. The first scene at once introduces us into the midst of the troublous times which form the sombre background of the tragedy. Young nobles of the Orsini faction are endeavouring to carry off by force Irene, Rienzi's sister, a beautiful maiden. They are interrupted by their enemies the Colonnas, one of whom, young Adriano, loves Irene, and rescues her from the grasp of her pursuers. A street fight ensues, in which citizens take part, until Rienzi appears and stills the tumult. The nobili indignantly give way to the superior numbers of the people, and consent to fight out their quarrel outside the walls of Rome, whereat Rienzi orders the city gates

to be shut against them, and is hailed as liberator and tribune of the people by the multitude.

The second act shows a large hall in the Capitol, where the new order of things is celebrated by the people and their leader. "Messengers of peace" arrive, and announce that the whole Roman territory has submitted to the peaceful rule of the Tribune. Ambassadors of the Empire are introduced, and, to their dismay, Rienzi proudly declares that henceforth the choice of a king of Rome will lie with the Romans alone. The nobili also arrive, feigning submission; but during the feast an attempt is made on the Tribune's life by one of them, when Rienzi, warned by Adriano and protected by secret armour, frustrates the murderous design, and the traitors are sentenced to death by the vote of the senators and the acclamations of the infuriated people. In this supreme emergency Adriano and Irene intercede for old Colonna. To their prayer Rienzi yields, and, with Adriano's father, the other nobili gain a pardon.

In the third act the consequences of the Tribune's ill-timed clemency become apparent. The nobili have flown from the city, and Rienzi once more has to meet them in the field of battle, and once more vanquishes them. But what the sword has failed to do intrigue and statecraft accomplish. The nobili enter into secret alliance with the Church, which at first had favoured the popular rising; and when on his return from the battle the victorious Tribune is on the point of entering the church of St. John Lateran he is met by Cardinal Raimondo, who pronounces his excommunication before the assembled Romans. This seals Rienzi's doom. The

pious fear of the multitude is worked upon by conspirators, and during a revolt the Tribune perishes in the flames of the Capitol with his sister, who, refusing Adriano's offers of rescue, heroically resolves to share her brother's fate. With a terrific crash the front edifice of the capitol breaks down, burying Rienzi, Irene, and Adriano in the ruins; "the nobili fall upon the people"—is the significant final stage direction.

In judging of the music of 'Rienzi' one should think of the circumstances in which it was composed. "I completed 'Rienzi,'" Wagner says, "during my first stay in Paris. I had the splendid Grand Opera before me, and my ambition was not only to imitate, but with reckless extravagance to surpass all that had gone before in brilliant finales, hymns, processions, and musical clang of arms. While writing the libretto I simply thought of an opera text which would enable me to display the principal forms of grand opera, such as introductions, finales, choruses, arias, duets, trios, etc., with all possible splendour." This merely decorative purpose is but too observable in a great part of the music, which, moreover, is decidedly wanting in individuality of style; showing, as it does, the influence of Spontini, Meyerbeer, and the Italian school. The duet, to quote but one example, between Irene and Adriano in the first act might have been written by Donizetti in a not very favourable mood. On the other hand, there are signs of incipient power which proclaim the future reformer of the music-drama. The opening recitative in which Rienzi charges the nobili with the ruin of the eternal city is marvellously forcible, and the broad

melodiousness of Rienzi's "prayer" clings to the memory after a single hearing. But the climax of the musical conception as well as of the drama must be discovered in the second act. It opens with the charming episode of the "peace messengers," which, after some introductory choral singing, contains a soprano solo, as suavely melodious and as expressive as can well be imagined. The conspirators' trio, with chorus, is also full of highly dramatic points, but the finale of the act is by far the finest piece of construction in the opera. Its dimensions, it is true, are colossal, and the long ballet introduced may to some appear tedious, but this once over we are kept in a fever of excitement till the end. The single components of the piece afford every variety. We have a "Misereatur Dominum" announcing the impending death of the nobili, Irene's and Adriano's pleading for mercy, Rienzi's wavering replies, and the impression all this produces on the people, worked into a picture as grand as in the highest sense it is homogeneous. Remarkable from a melodious point of view is the beautifully broad theme in G, announcing the respite of the traitors, and which foreshadows the style of 'Lohengrin' and 'Tannhäuser.' A brilliant theme in C Major, familiar from the allegro of the overture, brings the act to a close.

To sum up, 'Rienzi' is by no means without great beauties, and as a first work—for such it virtually is—it was well adapted to raise the expectations of lovers of music to a high pitch. Its success at Dresden was indeed most brilliant, and, what is more, it has proved permanent; although neglected by Wagner and his

party, 'Rienzi' has kept the stage in Germany to the present day.

It is, moreover, the only work of Wagner which has met with so much as a *succès d'estime* in Paris, and when Mr. Carl Rosa in Jan. 1879 brought out an English version by Mr. J. P. Jackson at Her Majesty's theatre, the public accepted it in spite of its unfavourable position, coming, as it did, after 'Lohengrin,' 'Tannhäuser,' and 'The Flying Dutchman.'

The material improvement which the success of the opera caused in its author's career has already been noticed. His position was suddenly changed from that of a friendless stranger in a foreign land to that of the leader of one of the greatest art institutions in his own country. But Wagner was not a man to rest on his laurels. Neither did his official duties so engross his time as to make him forget his vocation as a creative artist. His first step in this direction was the preparation for the stage of his second and more important work, 'The Flying Dutchman,' composed, the reader will remember, during the time of his worst troubles in France. The importance of this work for the development of the composer's musical style has already been touched upon, and as Wagner's music always flows as it were out of the words, it might almost be taken for granted that a commensurate improvement is observable in the dramatic poem. In addition to this the libretto of 'The Flying Dutchman' has a peculiar interest for English readers, being as it is connected with this country in a double way. It was during a stormy voyage from Riga to London that the composer realized

the tragic hero of the old myth. There is further every reason to believe, that even the treatment of his subject came to him—by a somewhat indirect channel it must be owned—from an English source. The following is the result of some investigation into the matter, which the present writer has been able to make.

The legend of 'The Flying Dutchman,' the weary wanderer of the main, dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century, and is like that of the 'Wandering Jew' an embodiment of the unsettled feeling of the epoch caused by the discoveries of a new faith by the Germans, and of a new world by the Spaniards. Captain Vanderdecken, as is generally known, tries to double the Cape in the teeth of a gale, and swears he will carry out his purpose, should he have to sail till Doomsday. The oath, heard and accepted in its literal meaning by the devil, causes the Dutchman's fate to roam for ever on the ocean far from his wife and his beloved Holland. Modern poets have tried in various ways to release the unfortunate seaman from his doom. The *dénouement* of the story adopted by Wagner was invented by Heinrich Heine. In his fragmentary story, 'The Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski'—a kind of autobiographic pseudonym it would appear—Heine tells us how, on his passage from Hamburg to Amsterdam, he saw a vessel with blood red sails, very likely the phantom ship of 'The Flying Dutchman,' whom shortly afterwards, he says, he saw in the flesh on the stage of the last-mentioned city. The new feature added to the old story is this,—that, instead of an unconditional doom, Vanderdecken is sentenced to eternal homelessness,

unless he be released by the love of a woman "faithful unto death." The devil, stupid as he is, does not believe in the virtue of women, and therefore consents to the Captain's going ashore once every seven years for the purpose of taking a wife on trial. Many unsuccessful attempts have been made by the poor Dutchman, till at last, just after the lapse of another period of seven years, he meets a Scotch (according to Wagner a Norwegian) skipper, and by the display of wealth readily obtains his consent to a proposed marriage with his daughter. This daughter (called Senta in Wagner's drama) has formed a romantic attachment for the unfortunate sailor, whose story she knows, and whose picture hangs in her room. By this likeness she recognizes the real Flying Dutchman, but, in spite of her discovery, accepts the offer of his hand. At this moment Schnabelewopski-Heine is, by an unforeseen and indescribable incident, called away from the theatre, and on his return is only just in time to see the Dutchman on board his own ship, setting out for another voyage of hopeless despair. He loves his bride, and would save her from sharing his doom. But she, "faithful unto death," ascends a rock, and throws herself into the waves. Thus the spell is broken, and in the final tableau the Flying Dutchman, reunited with his bride, is seen entering the long closed gates of eternal rest.

The two most striking additions to the old story, in Heine's account of the imaginary performance, are the fact of the Dutchman's taking a wife, and the allusion to a picture. Both these features occur in a play by the late Mr. Fitzball, which at the time

of Heine's visit to London (in 1827) was running at the Adelphi Theatre. Adding to this the fact that the German poet conscientiously studied the English stage, nothing seems more likely than that he should have adopted the features alluded to from the English playwright. Here, however, his indebtedness ends. Fitzball knows nothing of the beautiful idea of woman's redeeming love. According to him, the Flying Dutchman is the ally of a monster of the deep seeking for victims. Wagner, further developing Heine's idea, has made the hero himself to symbolize that feeling of unrest and ceaseless struggle which finds its solution in death and forgetfulness alone. The gap in Heine's story he has filled up by an interview of Senta with Eric, her discarded lover, which the Dutchman mistakes for a breach of faith on the part of his wife, till Senta's voluntary death dispels his suspicion.

The musical treatment of 'The Flying Dutchman' marks the transition period in Wagner's career. He is evidently endeavouring to free himself from the forms of the traditional opera, but involuntarily falls back into what, from a merely dramatic point of view, appears to be a concession to music absolutely speaking. If the unity of his style is somewhat impaired by this circumstance there are, on the other hand, in the score numerous points of great beauty and dramatic force. Amongst these may be mentioned the 'Steersman's Song,' in the first act, Senta's ballad, the theme of which appears as "leading-motive" throughout the opera, the lovely and deservedly popular spinning chorus, and the magnificent duet between Senta and the Dutchman. The

character of the hero is a masterpiece of musical delineation; but the most admirable feature of the work is the weird atmosphere of the northern sea, which breathes in every note of the music from the overture to the sailor's chorus in the last act. The last-named fact is especially remarkable in a man born and living for the greater part of his life hundreds of miles away from the sea.

The contrast between the spectacular effects (combined though they may appear with great dramatic power) in 'Rienzi,' and the purely artistic means of rendering emotional accents, aimed at in the Dutchman, is at once striking and relieving. It resembles the sense of freedom one feels in passing from the scented atmosphere of a crowded opera house into the bracing air of sea and forest.

But it is in a still higher sense that the latter work signifies the ideal regeneration, the antique Catharsis of Wagner as a man and artist. Up to this time brilliant success had been the chief aim of his thoughts; now that disappointment and misery had weaned the strong man from his cherished hopes, he retired into himself, intent upon following the call of his only remaining friend, the Muse. 'The Flying Dutchman' was begun without a hope, almost without a wish, for outward success; Wagner only felt that what he had to say was true to himself, and so he said it, listen who liked. In this way, and urged only by the necessity of his nature, Wagner entered upon his new career without imagining himself the bearing of his reformatory act on the progress of art in general.

'The Flying Dutchman' was performed for the first time in England at Drury Lane Theatre in 1870, under Arditi, when Mdlle. Ilma de Murska took the part of Senta, and Mr. Santley that of L'Ollandese-dannato, as the opera in its Italian dress was called. A second Italian version (with M. Maurel as the hero and Mdlle. Albani as Senta) called "*Il Vascello Fantasma*" was brought out at Covent Garden in June 1877. In the interval an English version of the opera had been produced at the Lyceum Theatre by Mr. Carl Rosa (Oct. 1876), when Mr. Santley again was 'The Flying Dutchman,' and gave one of the finest renderings of that part ever witnessed.

During his stay in Paris Wagner had become acquainted with the old popular story of Tannhäuser, the knightly singer who tarried in the mountain of Venus. This story, in connection with an imaginary prize singing at Wartburg, the residence of the Dukes of Thuringia, struck him at once as eminently adapted for dramatic purposes. The impression was increased when, on his way to Dresden, he visited the romantic old castle surrounded by the nimbus of both history and romance, and overlooking a wide and varied expanse of field and forest. The poem of 'Tannhäuser' was written soon afterwards, even before the first performance of 'Rienzi'; the music he finished by the end of 1844. The fundamental idea strikes one as somewhat similar to that of 'The Flying Dutchman.' It is again the self-surrendering love of pure woman, which in death releases the hero; nay, to carry the parallel still further, the Venusberg itself with its lust, and the satiety follow-

ing thereafter, is only another aspect of the same cruel world which in the prior opera was symbolized by the waves of the ocean. Both Senta and Elizabeth would in that case be the representatives of that purest idea of art, which alone can save its worshipper from the world and its lures, "for music," as Wagner has expressed it on another occasion, "is a woman whose nature is love surrendering itself unconditionally."

The plot in which these ideas are embodied may be told in a few lines. The opening scene shows Tannhäuser in the realms of Venus surrounded by her nymphs. He celebrates the beauty of the goddess in impassioned song, but at the same time expresses his longing for the fields and forests, the sound of bells and the song of birds, all of which he left behind when he came to dwell in the enchanted mountain. In spite of the tears and the allurements of Venus he resolves to leave her, and as he utters the name of the Virgin, the grotto in which they have been tarrying disappears, and we are transferred to one of those beautiful glades of the Thuringian forest which may still be seen near castle Wartburg. Count Hermann of Thuringia soon appears surrounded by the knightly singers of his court, who all welcome Tannhäuser on his return to their midst. Wolfram von Eschenbach reveals to Tannhäuser the love inspired by the song of the bold knight in the heart of Elizabeth, the niece of Count Hermann, and the regret she has felt at his mysterious absence.

In the second act we see the banquetting hall of Wartburg Castle, prepared for the prize-singing of the

minstrels. The hand of Elizabeth is to be the guerdon of the victor, but her heart had been given long ago to Tannhäuser. This the maiden herself confesses to the minstrel as they meet in the hall before the arrival of the guests. That arrival is soon announced by the spirited strains of the march which every one knows; and the prize-singing begins in due course, the subject being the nature of love. Wolfram celebrates the beauty of pure unselfish adoration, such as he himself feels for Elizabeth. Tannhäuser, on the other hand, upholds the right of passionate human love, intense and reciprocal. The other singers take part with Wolfram. The audience applaud their virtuous sentiments till Tannhäuser, goaded to madness by their opposition, bursts forth with his song in praise of Venus, at the same time confessing his unholy amours with that goddess. Count Hermann and his knights are on the point of punishing Tannhäuser's crime with immediate death, when Elizabeth throws herself between their drawn swords and her faithless lover. By her intercession Tannhäuser is permitted to join the procession of pilgrims on their way to Rome, whose songs are heard in the distance. The act closes with a magnificent finale, the worthy climax of a scene which for psychological subtlety, dramatic passion, and commensurate musical beauty it would be difficult to equal.

In the third act the pilgrims are returning from Rome, and Elizabeth, accompanied by Wolfram, has gone to meet them in the hope of finding Tannhäuser amongst them. Disappointed in that hope she retires to the castle broken-hearted. Wolfram alone remains

on the scene and is soon afterwards joined by Tannhäuser, who in a passion of bitter grief relates the tale of his pilgrimage. To him alone Pope Urban has refused forgiveness ; holding up his staff the holy father has exclaimed, "No sooner than this dry wood shall bring forth green leaves shall thy sins be forgiven." Despairing of God and the world Tannhäuser is on his way back to Venus, and already the song of her syrens becomes faintly audible in the distance, when there is heard from the castle the sound of the bell which announces the death of Elizabeth, and once more struck by repentance, Tannhäuser expires in the arms of Wolfram with "Pray for me, saint Elizabeth," on his lips. At the same moment some of the younger pilgrims arrive from Rome, carrying with them the staff of the Pope covered with fresh leaves.

Compared with its predecessor 'Tannhäuser' marks a decided advance both from a dramatic and musical point of view. The character of the hero, representing in its large typical features one of the deepest problems of human nature, stands boldly forth from the chiaroscuro of its romantic surroundings, and the abundance of melodious strains (some of them, as for instance the March already referred to and Wolfram's Address to the Evening Star, of a popular character) in 'Tannhäuser' has perhaps contributed more to the spreading of its author's name than any of his other works. But there are merits of an infinitely higher type in the score. The overture itself is a master-piece of its kind : it foreshadows the keynote of the drama itself, the victory of good over evil, the former represented by

the solemn strains of the Pilgrims' Chorus, the latter by the sensuous melodies which accompany the joys of the Venusberg. Again the large finale of the second act is a marvel of musical design, and Tannhäuser's narration in the final scene has never, not even by Wagner himself, been surpassed as regards force and impressiveness of declamation.

'Tannhäuser' was performed for the first time at Dresden in 1845, and soon made its way to the leading German stages. Its reception, although in most places favourable, was varied, and the opposition to the new movement inaugurated by Wagner made itself felt in several places. The press especially assumed that hostile position, which up till lately it held almost without exception, and partly still continues to hold. Wagner began to feel that as yet the new dramatic language spoken by him could be addressed only to a few sympathizing friends. This sense of isolation, combined with his daily experience of the utter want of artistic aims and principles in the management of the great German theatres, surrounded him with an atmosphere of morbid discontentedness, in which a change at any price seemed a relief, and it was in this mood that he, although little of a politician, joined the insurrectionary movement of 1848 and 1849 by word and deed. Two pamphlets written during this period prove how, even in the highest excitement of active partisanship, he never lost sight of his artistic mission. One of them relates to the foundation of a truly national theatre at Dresden, while the other, 'Art and Revolution,' tries to demonstrate the close connection between

the regeneration of political life and similar tendencies in contemporary art.

The Titan was again progressing in enormous strides towards Utopia. But alas for the clumsy realities of our earthly existence! The revolution at Dresden was crushed by Prussian bayonets, and Wagner had once more to take up his staff and fly the country as an exile. After a short sojourn at Paris, where he seemed to be drawn by a sort of unacknowledged fascination, and where with equal certainty bitterest disappointment lay in wait for him, he retired to Switzerland, severed from his friends and country, and without the shadow of a hope of ever being able again to interpret his works to his nation.

Before leaving the Dresden period it is, however, necessary to refer to one of the most important creative results of that period, viz. the opera 'Lohengrin,' which was composed during the revolutionary troubles, and in its spiritual beauty and purity illustrates the wonderful power of concentration and absorption which is peculiar to a true artist.

After the completion of 'Tannhäuser' in 1845 Wagner turned to a subject, in form and idea the very opposite to the tragic elevation of that opera. It marked the change from the romantic surroundings of the mediæval castle of Wartburg to the domestic narrowness of a worthy artisan's household during the sixteenth century. The Mastersingers of Nürnberg, with their homely conception of life and art, were intended by Wagner originally as a kind of humorous pendant to the knightly poets in 'Tannhäuser,' from which, however, the

redeeming features of true honesty and justified self-assertion were not absent. The idea was carried out in a very modified form many years afterwards. For the time it was abandoned in favour of another romantic subject, 'Lohengrin, the Knight of the Swan,' finished in March 1848, but not performed till two years later at Weimar.

The story of Lohengrin, Parcival's son, on which Wagner has founded his drama, is a compound of many different elements. The Celtic mabinogion, with King Arthur and his knights, and the mystic symbolism of the San Graal, the holy vessel (*gradale* or *sang real*, whichever it may be), are mixed up with local traditions of the lower Rhine of a knight who arrives in a boat without sail or oar, drawn by a swan. In this form the story appears in a quaint collection of riddles, repartees, and legends of various kinds, which are brought into a loose connection by an imaginary prize-singing at Wartburg, where they are put in the mouths of the most celebrated poets of the period. The story of Lohengrin is supposed to be told by the great minnesinger, Wolfram von Eschenbach, whose representative poem, 'Parcival,' might suggest such an arrangement to the compiler of the 'Wartburgkrieg.' The reader will perceive that Wagner's careful studies for his 'Tannhäuser' were made to some purpose. At the same time he found in the old mediæval books little more than the barest outline of his new dramatic conception. All the rest was left to his own imagination to supply.

The ideal background, from which the joys and sorrows of the human actors in 'Lohengrin' are reflected with

supernal light, is the conception of the Holy Graal itself, the mystic symbol of Christian faith, or, in a wider sense, of everything divine and great, as it reveals itself to the vision of the pure and self-surrendering soul. Such an act of revelation is the subject of the instrumental prelude which serves Lohengrin as an overture. The prelude, and in a certain sense the opera itself, are based on one melodious phrase—the Graal-motive—or, one might even say, on the change of the two chords (A major and F sharp minor) which form the harmonious foundation of that prominent melody. To explain the full meaning of this it is necessary to state, what in Wagner's operas is generally called the "Leitmotive," *i.e.* leading motive or melody. For every important idea or passionate impulse of his characters Wagner introduces a certain striking harmonious or melodious combination, as the musical complement of their dramatic force. Wherever in the course of the drama this impulse comes into action, we hear at once its corresponding motive, either sung by the voice or played by the orchestra, and in manifold variations, according to circumstances. The opening chorus of the pilgrims, interrupted by the wild rhythms of the Venusberg, as the representative melodies of the good and evil principles, in the overture to 'Tannhäuser,' or the romance in the 'Flying Dutchman,' may serve as examples of "leading motives." The great gain of intensity and dramatic unity which is thus effected in the musical conception of a character or idea is of course obvious. A similar repetition of melodies had been previously applied, but only in a very occasional and

undecided manner, by Weber, Meyerbeer, and others. As a distinct principle of art it is entirely due to Wagner's creative genius.

The prelude to 'Lohengrin' opens with a long-drawn chord of the violins in the highest octaves, continued with the tenderest pianissimo through several bars. It is like the thin white clouds floating in a serene sky, shapeless as yet and scarcely distinguishable from the ethereal blue surrounding them. But suddenly the violins sound as from the furthest distance and in continued pianissimo, the Graal-motive, and at once the clouds take form and motion. The inner eye discovers a group of angels as they approach, slowly descending from the height of heaven and carrying in their midst the holy vessel. Sweetest harmonies float around them, gradually increasing in warmth and variety, till at last, with the fortissimo of the full orchestra, the sacred mystery in all its overpowering splendour is revealed to the enchanted eye. After this climax of religious ecstasy the harmonious waves begin to recede, and with their ebbing motion the angels gradually, as they have come, return to their celestial abode. Such was, according to Wagner's own indication, the poetical, or one might almost say the pictorial, idea which suggested the harmonies of his prelude, and never have the sweetnesses and shudderings of Christian mysticism been more fully expressed than in this triumph of instrumental music.

The fresh allegro at the opening of the first act leads us back from the sphere of transcendental inspiration to the stream of actual life, and when the curtain rises

we see King Henry of Germany, surrounded by his feudal vassals and retainers, in a meadow by the side of the Scheldt, near Antwerp. He has assembled the nobles of Brabant, to call on their faithful services against the savage Hungarians, the most dangerous enemies of the Empire, and at the same time to mediate in their internal dissensions. The cause of these troubles we hear from the mouth of Count Telramund, a great noble, who accuses Elsa, Princess of Brabant, of having murdered her infant brother during a solitary walk, from which she alone returned, pretending to have lost sight of him in the wood. The motive of this black deed he finds in Elsa's affection for a secret lover, with whom she hopes to share the rule of the country after her brother's death. This rule, however, Telramund claims for himself, on the ground of his having been chosen by the late duke as Elsa's husband, although the proud maiden spurned his addresses. He also alleges that his present wife, Ortrud, is a scion of the old heathenish Dukes of Friesland who once ruled over the country. The musical part of his scene is treated in a kind of continuous arioso, resembling most the recitativo obbligato of the regular opera, but showing an immense progress upon it as regards power and accuracy of declamation. Telramund's impeachment of Elsa reminds one in its simple grandeur of the grave accents of the antique drama. Of "leading motives" may be mentioned that representing the king, which consists of a kind of fanfare, and throughout occurs in the key of C Major.

At the king's command Elsa appears before him, accompanied by a few plaintive notes of sweet melodious-

ness in the orchestra. They soon lead to a new theme, which might be called the "Dream Motive," for it is to its strains that Elsa relates, how a knight of heavenly beauty has appeared to her in a trance, promising his assistance in defending her innocence. The same knight she now chooses for her champion in the ordeal which has been granted by the king at Telramund's demand. Here again the different passions of the chief characters—Telramund's hatred, Elsa's confidence, the king's compassion, and the echo of these feelings in the hearts of the multitude are rendered by the music in the finest nuances. The dramatic climax is reached when, after the second call of the herald, and during Elsa's fervent prayer, there suddenly appears, first in the far distance, but quickly approaching, a boat drawn by a white swan, and in it, leaning on his shield, a knight as Elsa has seen him in her vision. The change from doubt and wildest astonishment to joy and triumphant belief, as expressed in a choral piece of the grandest conception, creates this scene one of the greatest effects dramatic music has ever achieved; and one is not astonished at reading of the tumult of enthusiastic applause with which the impulsive Italian audience greeted the appearance of Lohengrin at the first performance of the opera at Bologna. It should also be mentioned that a great part of this overpowering impression is due to the masterly arrangement of the scenic effect indicated in its minutest details by the composer himself.

As soon as Lohengrin leaves his boat a perfect calm follows the outbreak of clamorous joy, and every one listens in silence as he bids farewell to the

swan, his faithful guide through the perils of the deep. After this Lohengrin loudly declares the falseness of Telramund's accusation, and asks for Elsa's hand as the prize of his valour to be exercised in her defence. But before the battle begins she must promise him never to ask a question as to his being, or the place whence he came to her rescue. With this demand of implicit belief we have reached the tragic keynote of the drama, and its importance is musically indicated by a new melody of gravest rhythmical import, the 'Motive of Warning.' When Elsa grants and promises everything in self-surrendering confidence, Lohengrin, who hitherto seemed surrounded by unapproachable sublimity, is overcome by her sweet innocence, and breaks out into the passionate words, "Elsa, I love Thee!" Here again the effect of the musical interpretation leaves any description in words far behind. The rest of the act is chiefly taken up by Lohengrin's easy victory over Telramund, and a grand *ensemble*, expressive of triumphant joy, which in its structure resembles the traditional form of the finale.

When the curtain rises a second time we see Telramund, whose life has been saved by his adversary's magnanimity, and Ortrud lying prostrate in despairing hatred on the steps of the royal palace, the illuminated windows of which, combined with the festive noise of a banquet, increase the dreary darkness outside. The ensuing duet is musically founded on a new motive, intended to represent the evil principle of heathenish hatred and revenge, as opposed to the heavenly purity of the 'Gaal-Motive.' For Ortrud now discloses

herself as the representative of old Friesian paganism, who by her falsehood and witchcraft has led her husband to the accusation of the innocent Christian maiden. The introduction in a by-the-way manner of the two great religious principles appears not particularly happy, and it cannot be denied that the character of Ortrud, although grand in its dramatic conception, has slightly suffered through this unnecessary complication of motives. Her plan of revenge is founded on the prohibited question regarding Lohengrin's identity, the asking of which she knows to be fatal to his bride. When Elsa soon afterwards appears on the balcony Ortrud is pityingly admitted into her presence, and repays the kindness of her protectress by beginning at once to sow the seed of doubt in the innocent heart of her victim.

The next scene contains a grand display of scenic effect in the bridal procession of Elsa, which in slow solemnity moves from the palace to the cathedral, accompanied by the solemn strains of chorus and orchestra. In this masterly way of illustrating the deeper meaning of a dumb ceremony by a kind of decorative music, Wagner's art and dramatic vocation are shown almost as much as in the stronger accents of passion. Amongst the ladies in attendance is Ortrud, and at the moment when Elsa is going to enter the cathedral, she steps forward, and claims precedence for herself, taunting her enemy at the same time with the dark origin of the Knight of the Swan. The scene is evidently suggested by the quarrel of the two Queens in the *Nibelungenlied*, and, although fine in itself, loses somewhat by its parallelism with the next, when Telramund

suddenly appears and accuses Lohengrin of having been victorious by means of witchcraft, daring him at the same time to lift the veil of mystery hanging round him. Lohengrin proudly spurns the slander of an outlaw, appealing to Elsa as his sole judge on earth; and after she has expressed her unshaken confidence, the twice-interrupted procession reaches its destination

The third act introduces us to the bridal-chamber of the newly-united pair. It begins with the outpourings of unimpaired love and happiness. But soon the evil seed of doubt sown by Ortrud's calumnious insinuations begins to grow. In all her bliss Elsa feels there is something strange standing between herself and her lord, embittering the sweetness of her love with secret misgivings. The way in which this at first shy and subdued feeling is worked up gradually to the pitch of irrepressible curiosity is a masterpiece of psychological characterization. The calming and imploring words of her saviour and lover, accompanied by the solemn repetition of the 'Motive of Warning,' nay, even the heroic feelings of her own heart, that wishes to share any possible danger, are with womanly logic turned into arguments for asking a question which must lead to the certain misery of both. At last, just when she has uttered the fatal words, Count Telramund rushes into the room with two other assassins, but is easily slain by Lohengrin's sword, which Elsa hands to her husband.

The last scene shows the same meadow by the Scheldt as in the first act. King Henry and his

vassals are preparing for their departure to the war. But their knightly joy is interrupted by the corpse of Telramund being carried into their presence. Soon Elsa, and after her Lohengrin, appear. By his wife's unfortunate rashness he is now compelled to disclose his origin and name, as Lohengrin Parcival's son, the Knight of the Graal. The piece in which this is done, showing the 'Graal-Motive' in its fullest development, and the impressive melody of his parting song, are amongst the most beautiful parts of the opera. At this moment Ortrud appears and tells the astonished audience that the swan which is seen approaching in the distance is no other than Elsa's brother, who has been bewitched by herself into this form, but would have been released without his sister's indiscretion; now he is doomed for ever. But in this last emergency the divine power intervenes again. Lohengrin kneels down in silent prayer, and when he rises the swan has disappeared, and a beautiful youth, the Duke of Brabant, stands by his side. Elsa flies to his embrace, and dies in his arms; while the boat of Lohengrin, drawn by a white dove, and accompanied by the plaintive notes of the "Graal-Motive" in minor chords, disappears in the distance.

The first performance of 'Lohengrin' is connected with one of the most charming episodes of Wagner's life—his friendship with Franz Liszt. The intimate relations between these two great composers, subsisting at the present day and under circumstances which would have made jealousies and mutual animosities but too excusable, seem to claim our passing attention.

The thought of rivalry seems never to have entered their minds, although the zeal of enthusiastic partisans can never have been absent to fan the slightest spark of an ungracious feeling into a flame. But for more than twenty years both Wagner and Liszt have worked for the same purpose of artistic reform in their individual spheres, and not once has the source of purest friendship been tainted by a drop of bitterness. For an account of the origin and circumstances of this friendship I borrow the eloquent words of Wagner himself.

The following sketch, written in 1851, refers to the time when, after the revolution of 1849, Wagner, as the reader will recollect, had to fly the country, and in this way was cut off from all artistic *rappport* with his friends at home. "Again," Wagner says, "I was thoroughly disheartened from undertaking any new artistic scheme. Only recently I had had proofs of the impossibility of making my art intelligible to the public, and all this deterred me from beginning new dramatic works. Indeed, I thought that everything was at an end with my artistic creativeness. From this state of mental dejection I was raised by a friend. By most evident and undeniable proofs he made me feel that I was not deserted, but, on the contrary, understood deeply by those even who were otherwise most distant from me; in this way he gave me back my full artistic confidence.

"This wonderful friend has been to me Franz Liszt. I must enter a little more deeply into the character of this friendship, which to many has seemed paradoxical. Indeed, I have been compelled to appear repellent and hostile on so many sides, that I almost feel a want of

communication with regard to this our sympathetic union.

“I met Liszt for the first time during my earliest stay in Paris, and at a period when I had renounced the hope, nay, even the wish, of a Paris reputation, and, indeed, was in a state of internal revolt against the artistic life I found there. At our meeting Liszt appeared to me the most perfect contrast to my own being and situation. In this world, to which it had been my desire to fly from my narrow circumstances, Liszt had grown up, from his earliest age, so as to be the object of general love and admiration at a time when I was repulsed by general coldness and want of sympathy. . . . In consequence, I looked upon him with suspicion. I had no opportunity of disclosing my being and working to him, and, therefore, the reception I met with on his part was altogether of a superficial kind, as was indeed quite natural in a man to whom every day the most divergent impressions claimed access. But I was not in a mood to look with unprejudiced eyes for the natural cause of his behaviour, which, friendly and obliging in itself, could not but hurt me in that state of my mind. I never repeated my first call on Liszt, and without knowing or even wishing to know him, I was prone to look upon him as strange and adverse to my nature.

“My repeated expression of this feeling was afterwards reported to Liszt, just at the time when my ‘Rienzi’ at Dresden attracted general attention. He was surprised to find himself misunderstood with such violence by a man whom he had scarcely known, and whose acquaintance

now seemed not without value to him. I am still touched at recollecting the repeated and eager attempts he made to change my opinion of him, even before he knew any of my works. He acted not from any artistic sympathy, but led by the purely human wish of discontinuing a casual disharmony between himself and another being ; perhaps he also felt an infinitely tender misgiving of having really hurt me unconsciously. He who knows the terrible selfishness and insensibility in our social life, and especially in the relations of modern artists to each other, cannot but be struck with wonder, nay, delight, by the treatment I experienced from this extraordinary man.

“Liszt soon afterwards witnessed a performance of ‘Rienzi’ at Dresden, on which he had almost to insist ; and after that I heard from all the different corners of the world where he had been on his artistic excursions, how he had everywhere expressed his delight with my music, and, indeed, had—I would rather believe unintentionally — canvassed people’s opinions in my favour.

“This happened at a time when it became more and more evident that my dramatic works would have no outward success. But just when the case seemed desperate, Liszt succeeded by his own energy in opening a hopeful refuge to my art. He ceased his wanderings, settled down at the small modest Weimar, and took up the conductor’s baton, after having been at home so long in the splendour of the greatest cities of Europe. At Weimar I saw him for the last time, when I rested a few days in Thuringia, not yet certain whether the

threatening prosecution would compel me to continue my flight from Germany. The very day when my personal danger became a certainty I saw Liszt conducting a rehearsal of my 'Tannhäuser,' and was astonished at recognizing my second self in his achievement. What I had felt in inventing the music, he felt in performing it; what I wanted to express in writing it down he proclaimed in making it sound. Strange to say, through the love of this rarest friend I gained, at the moment of becoming homeless, a real home for my art, which I had longed for and sought for always in the wrong place. . . .

"At the end of my last stay at Paris, when ill, miserable, and despairing, I sat brooding over my fate, my eye fell on the score of my 'Lohengrin,' totally forgotten by me. Suddenly I felt something like compassion that this music should never sound from off the death-pale paper. Two words I wrote to Liszt; his answer was the news, that preparations for the performance were being made on the largest scale the limited means of Weimar would permit. Everything that men and circumstances could do was done in order to make the work understood. . . . Errors and misconceptions impeded the desired success. What was to be done to supply what was wanted, so as to further the true understanding on all sides, and with it the ultimate success of the work? Liszt saw it at once, and did it. He gave to the public his own impression of the work in a manner, the convincing eloquence and overpowering efficacy of which remain unequalled. Success was his reward, and with this success he now approaches me,

saying: 'Behold, we have come so far; now create us a new work that we may go still further.' "

The first performance of 'Lohengrin,' under Liszt, took place in 1850, as has already been stated. Although not at first received with undivided approval, the opera has in the long run proved the most successful of all Wagner's works. Its performance at Bologna established its composer's fame in "the land of song," and proved an important event for the progress of Italian opera, as the works of the younger Italian masters—Boito's 'Mefistofele,' foremost amongst them—tend to show. In this country, also, 'Lohengrin' has established Wagner's reputation on a firm basis. It was produced for the first time at Covent Garden, in May, 1875, and at Drury Lane in June of the same year. An English version by Mr. J. P. Jackson was brought out by Mr. Carl Rosa at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1880.

Wagner settled in Switzerland, reluctantly compelled to retire from active life in public. For a number of years he had no chance of witnessing, much less of conducting, one of his own works, and the existence of those works seemed threatened by the ruthless attacks on the absent man with which the German press never ceased to teem.

This weight of misery would have crushed a weaker man; Wagner's dramatic nature rose up in the contest. The conductor's baton was wrenched from his hand, so he took up the pen of the critic, attacking in their turn, and without distinction or mercy, all classes of society—musical conductors and authors, Jews, and critics, but

most severely of all, those mercenaries in his own branch of art who, making "a milch cow of the divine goddess," overflowed the stage with the shallow display of their artificialities. The mere invention of the incomparable term "*Kapellmeistermusik*" for this kind of production would secure Wagner a place amongst satirical writers.

That his invective was always wisely directed and used with discretion I should be sorry to assert. But it must be remembered, that in cleansing the stables of Augias one cannot be expected to be over-nice in his distinctions; moreover, the combative side of Wagner's power, which prevents him from discerning the pure gold in a mass of alloy, is too closely interwoven with the whole bias of his nature not to be forgiven by his friends. The bird's-eye view from the heights of genius must needs ignore many of those minute differences and considerations with which mortals of smaller stature are obliged to reckon. It is necessary to bear all this in mind in order to look with any amount of patience on the want of appreciation which many of the great composers have shown for each other's works—the abuse which Beethoven lavished on Haydn, Schumann on Meyerbeer, Wagner on that composer, and of late years on Schumann and Brahms. The fact is, that creative genius is inseparable from a strongly individual cast of mind, and therefore little apt to appreciate tendencies not strictly akin to its own. Wagner is anything but a safe musical critic; but his writings on the theory of music are none the less of the greatest value. It was by means of these theoretical speculations that

he himself for the first time became conscious of the bearing of his own artistic deeds on the progress of music. What he had done hitherto was like a groping in the dark for a distant light rather than the steady progress of the accomplished artist in the sunshine of his own aspirations.

Before entering into Wagner's system a little more closely it is well to remember the time when that system was first elaborated. Wagner's chief theoretical work, 'Opera and Drama,' was written about 1850, at Zurich; his practical reform of the Opera began, as we have seen, with 'The Flying Dutchman,' ten years before that date, and it was further developed in 'Tannhäuser' and 'Lohengrin.' These facts alone are sufficient to refute the favourite statement of Wagner's enemies, that he writes his operas according to, and in illustration of, a pre-conceived theoretical notion. Exactly the reverse is the case, for Wagner deduced that theory from his own works as well as from those of other masters. His first and most important step in the new direction was the transition from the historical to the mythical subject-matter, the former represented by 'Rienzi,' the latter by 'The Flying Dutchman,' and all his subsequent works, with the sole exception of the 'Master-singers,' which takes a separate position. This change was in the first instance caused by Wagner's own subjective feeling. During the time of his deepest misery in Paris he felt the necessity of embodying his grief in his art, and this longing for personal utterance led him from the much-trodden paths of the historic opera to the simple mythical types so eminently adapted to

embody that touch of suffering nature which establishes the kinship of the whole world across the gap of centuries. Hence the intensely personal conception which strikes us not only in 'The Flying Dutchman,' but in all the mythical creations of Wagner's muse from 'Tannhäuser' to 'Tristan' and 'Siegfried,' and which brings their sufferings home to us in a manner all the more intense as on examining our feelings we find that they have been excited by mere dint of imaginative power, unaided, but also unencumbered, by references to the unwieldy facts of history or the narrow troubles of our daily existence. Closely connected with this choice of subject-matter was the mode of Wagner's musical expression. It has been mentioned before that he was led to relinquish gradually the forms of absolute music introduced by earlier masters into the opera. Here, again, his reformatory measures were at first entirely unpremeditated. He did not expel the Aria or Finale through any whim of speculative iconoclasm, but he merely discontinued using these forms as unadapted to the particular thing he wanted to express; that is, to put it quite plainly, his characters were of too impulsive a kind to conform to the ordinary sequence of Largo and Allegro, his dramatic action too forcible in its progress to be suspended, till tonic and dominant had had their due. The perfect reciprocity between his musical and poetical conceptions has been explained by Wagner in so lucid a manner that I think I cannot do better than quote his own words on so important a point:—

“The plastic unity and simplicity of the mythical

subjects allowed of the concentration of the action on certain important and decisive points, and thus enabled me to rest on fewer scenes with a perseverance sufficient to expound the motive to its ultimate dramatic consequences. The nature of the subject, therefore, could not induce me in sketching my scenes to consider in advance their adaptability to any particular musical form, the kind of musical treatment being in each case necessitated by these scenes themselves. It could, therefore, not enter my mind to ingraft on this my musical form, growing as it did out of the nature of the scenes, the traditional forms of operatic music, which could not but have marred and interrupted its organic development. I therefore never thought of contemplating on principle, and as a deliberate reformer the destruction of the aria, duet, and other operatic forms, but the dropping of these forms followed consistently from the nature of my subjects."

It may be well in this connection to mention another point which tends to illustrate the absolute reciprocity between the musical and the dramatic elements in Wagner's art. We have seen how his musical inspiration flows entirely from the conditions of his dramatic subject. It was only natural that even for the rhythmical structure of his melos he should look to its poetical foundation. Modern verse could offer him but little assistance in this respect. In it metrical arsis and thesis as they existed in antique poetry have been entirely supplanted by the rhetorical accent of the words; and the different forms of verse founded on this principle prove often an impediment rather than an aid to musical

composition. The important attraction of rhyme is, for example, entirely useless to the composer ; blank verse, on the other hand, is a most unwieldy combination for musical purposes, and can indeed only be treated like prose. In this difficulty Wagner looked for help to the metrical basis of all Teutonic poetry, *i. e.* the alliterative principle, or “staff rhyme,” as he found it in the ‘Edda,’ and other remnants of ancestral lore. His ‘Ring of the Niblung,’ the subject of which also is taken from the old sagas, is written in a modified reproduction of the alliterative metre which Wagner treats with eminent skill, and very much in the same manner as Mr. Morris and Mr. E. Magnusson have done in our language in their admirable translations from the Icelandic.

The advantage of this new method for Wagner’s music is inestimable. The strong accents of the alliterating accents supply his melody with rhythmical firmness ; while, on the other hand, the unlimited number of low-toned syllables allows full liberty to the most varied nuances of declamatory expression. In order to exemplify the step in advance, the reader may compare the song in ‘Tannhäuser’ (Dir hohe liebe), where the iambic metre has been obliterated and where the verse is constantly cut to pieces by the musical caesura, with the wonderful love song from the ‘Valkyrie’ (‘Winterstürme wichen’), where verse and melody seem to glide on together in harmonious rhythms like the soft winds of spring of which they tell. To return to Wagner’s theoretical writings, the most important of them, such as ‘Opera and Drama,’ already referred to, ‘The

Work of Art of the Future,' and others, belong to the years 1850-52. They were written before Wagner became acquainted with the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, which plays so important a part in his later writings, and gives as it were the finishing touch to his theory of musical art. Any account of Wagner's system would be incomplete without reference to Schopenhauer's influence on the great composer's opinion, and although the results of that influence were first embodied in Wagner's pamphlet on Beethoven, published in 1870, it will be best to treat this side of the subject first. The reader, therefore, must excuse a short excursion on metaphysical grounds.

According to Schopenhauer it is the aim of all arts to express the eternal essence of things by means of the so-called "Platonic ideas," or, in other words, of the prototypes of all living things to which individuals are in the relation of single phenomena. These prototypes, Schopenhauer says, are never fully realized by nature, but they may be distinctly recognized in actually existing beings, although seldom or never in one individual. "True genius," Schopenhauer continues, "discovers in the single phenomenon its idea. He understands the half-spoken words of nature, and himself pronounces clearly her stammered utterance. He impresses the type of beauty vainly attempted by her in thousandfold formations on his hard marble, and places it before Nature, saying, as it were, 'See here what it was thy desire to express.' "

Music takes in this respect an exceptional position. Arts like painting and sculpture embody these ideas as

conceived by the artist through the medium of phenomena, the ideal value of which he shows, but only by the reproduction of their actual appearance. Even in poetry the realities of life and the visible wonders of the world, with their symbolic meaning, form an essential ingredient. Music, on the contrary, does not want, nor even allow of, a realistic conception. There is no sound in Nature fit to serve the musician as a model, or to supply him with more than an occasional suggestion for his sublime purpose. He approaches the original sources of existence more closely than all other artists—nay, even than Nature herself.

In this sense the musical composer is the only creative artist. While the painter or sculptor must borrow the raiment for his idea from the human form or the landscape, the musician is alone with his inspiration. He listens to the voice of the spirit of the world, or, which is the same, of his own spirit speaking to him as in a dream; for it is only in dreams, when the soul is not disturbed by the impression of the senses, that such a state of absorption is attainable, and Vogel's saying of Schubert, that he composed in a state of clairvoyance, may be applied to all creative musicians.

These are in brief the fundamental principles which Schopenhauer, first among philosophers, has laid down for the metaphysical essence of the art, and which Wagner has adopted without any modifications of importance in his pamphlet on Beethoven.

From the entirely supernatural character of music as established by Schopenhauer, Wagner proceeds to conclude its comparative independence of the conditions

under which the visible world acts upon our senses ; that is, of space and time. In an art of sound space is altogether out of the question ; but even time can in a certain sense be dispensed with in what is most musical in music—harmony. A harmonic chord, as such, is absolutely unmeasurable by time ; and in pieces, like the works of Palestrina, where the gradual progress from one harmonious combination to another is scarcely perceptible, the consciousness of change and with it that of passing time itself almost ceases. But music could not always remain in this state of passive calm, and as soon as its second most important element, rhythm, is introduced everything changes suddenly, and we are at once transported into the restless waves of time and progress. For, as we know from Aristoxenus, rhythm is nothing but a regular return of shorter and longer portions of time, as manifested by a movement performed in that time, the object of the movement in music being the succession of melodious intervals—*i. e.* the μέλος, or tune. Melody, therefore, is the daughter of the quiet repose in harmony and the throbbing motion of rhythm, and both elements are equally necessary for its beautiful growth. Still, rhythm being an intruder in the realm of pure music, the compositions which, like dances, are exclusively founded on it must be of a lower order than where the melody grows out of harmonious relations. With these three elements, *viz.* harmony, rhythm, and melody, we have exhausted the means of expression which music proper can call its own. Also as to its aims and objects there can be no doubt, after the foregoing remarks.

Music's own domain is the reign of unimpaired impulse—the tenderest vibrations of will and passion—as the immediate effluence of which we have to consider it. But its origin, as well as the character of its instruments, excludes it from rivalling articulate speech in the distinct rendering of emotions.

The purest and most adequate organ of the art in its independent state is instrumental music, the separate existence of which is of comparatively recent date, beginning with Bach and ending (if we may believe Wagner) with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. In the latter even the supreme genius of Beethoven confesses its inability of expressing its highest aspiration in music alone; it calls poetry to its assistance, and the words of Schiller's 'Freude,' added to Beethoven's enchanted strains, sound, as it were, the death knell of music in its separate condition, and the rise of a new epoch, in which music and poetry can be severed no more.

The combination of music and poetry, Wagner proceeds, to which Beethoven repaired when the insufficiency of his musical means became obvious, was of course not invented or used for the first time by him. It, on the contrary, preceded the artificial separation of the two arts. The traditions of all nations speak of the poet and singer as the same person, and the mere fact of the human voice being at the same time one of the most perfect musical instruments, seems to indicate the organic necessity of such a combination.

Besides, the musical element which exists in an embryonic and all but latent state in the spoken language can be interpreted and displayed in all its charms

only by the aid of real melody, which, as it were, must grow out of the rhythmical structure of verse and stanza. In their ideal aims also the two sister arts form a necessary complement to each other. The free expression of intense feeling in poetry is but too often encumbered; on the other hand, the soaring flight of music lacks a starting-point of strictly defined and recognizable pathos. Music and poetry, therefore, by both their powers and weaknesses, are referred to each other's aid; and the results of their combination will be of a higher order than is attainable by either of them in their separate state. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that their close union will be made possible only by a mutual compromise, in which both have to resign certain peculiarities of their own in favour of the common aim.

The way in which such a compromise has been attempted has varied considerably in different times and nations. In the lyrical parts of the Greek tragedy (for it is to the drama, as the highest result of both music and poetry, that we have to turn our chief attention) music, as we know, took a prominent part; so prominent, indeed, that the metrical structure of the choric pieces can be understood only from its connection with song. Still the essentially rhythmical nature of Greek composition could not be favourable to the flow of melody, which, as we have seen, depends for its more elevated effects chiefly on harmonious beauty. Unfortunately the sense for harmony in music seems to have been little in accordance with the other accomplishments of the most artistic nation of the world. Supposing even we follow

the most favourable accounts, polyphony was all but unknown to the Greeks, and the imperfect nature of their scales betrays, at least according to our notions, a certain want of musical ear. Under these circumstances it scarcely required the power of Æschylus or Sophocles to settle the question of preponderance in the Greek tragedy in favour of poetry, which had all the advantages of technical perfection in the hands of men of unmatched genius.

This state of things was entirely changed in the next important phase of dramatic music which we meet with in Italy, about the beginning of the seventeenth century. Like the *renaissance* of the fine arts the Italian Opera was or pretended to be a revival of antique traditions. But the affinity between the two epochs in regard to this was of a very superficial character. Music this time entered the lists under much more favourable auspices. First of all the language it had to deal with had lost its rhythmical character entirely; in poetry a mere counting of syllables had taken the place of metrical accentuation, and music was at full liberty to supply the want of arsis and thesis according to its own conditions. The character of modern feeling was likewise more akin to the intense, but vague and indistinct, nature of musical expression. In its way through the middle ages, with their romantic conception of love, and the mysterious terrors and charms of Christian revelation, mankind had lost that firm grasp of realities which always formed the substratum of the loftiest flights of Greek genius. There were certain vibrations of feeling in this longing for the supernatural which

would not allow of the limits of words, and absolutely required the medium of pure sound. At the epoch we speak of the great poets of Italy had passed away, and the void which had been left even by their mighty deeds now remained to be filled up by the musician, whose means were by this time more equal to his great task. For his art had now passed out of the stage of childish stammering. The homophonous innocence of Doric and Mixolydic scales had left only a dim tradition. Music had undergone the uncouth attempts at discipline which we usually attribute to Hucbald. She had learnt from Guittone di Arezzo to fix her thoughts in indelible signs, and two centuries training in the school of the Netherlands had taught her the powers of polyphonous development. When this school reached its climax in the great Orlando di Lasso, and in Goudimel's pupil, the divine Roman, Palestrina, music had no longer to shun companion with any of the sister arts.

The superior position which it was thus enabled to take could not be favourable to its harmonious co-operation with poetry in the result of their combined efforts—the opera. It is true that at the beginning the rights of music were asserted in a very modest way. In the first lyrical drama, ‘Daphnis,’ performed at Florence in 1594, the musical part seems to have consisted chiefly in the transformation of the spoken dialogue into recitative, both of the “secco” and “obbligato” kinds, accompanied by the orchestra such as it was at the time. But Monteverde soon afterwards became bolder in his musical conceptions. Both the orchestral and vocal resources were increased by the introduction of

so-called symphonies (*i. e.* preludes and interludes), and *ensemble* pieces for the singers. Alessandro Scarlatti first used the regular form of the aria in the opera, which henceforth became entirely dependent on musical purposes. Certain established forms of absolute music, such as finale or duet, were bodily transferred into the action of the piece without any regard to their poetical propriety. In the course of time the poet became the bondsman of the musician, and had to arrange his libretti (as they were ignominiously called) entirely according to the arbitrary decision of the latter. Even the human voice, the last stronghold of the poetical element in music, was treated like any other instrument, only with a view to displaying its beauties of sound. In most cases it seems as if words had been put into the mouth of the singer only as more convenient for him to pronounce than meaningless vowels. At best their significance served to give the composer some slight indication whether to write a brilliant allegro or a languid adagio. Nearly the same might be said of the whole dramatic poem, the merits of which depended almost entirely on its adaptedness for musical purposes.

Soon, however, music in its own sphere had to experience the evil results of this neglect of its natural foundation. Forgetful of its higher artistic aims, it lost hold of all poetic meaning, and was degraded to a mere display of skill on the part of clever vocalists. If formerly the composer had encroached upon the domain of the poet he now on his part was made the slave of the singer, who with great real merit as a vocal virtuoso, combined perfect innocence of higher artistic intentions.

It was against this omnipotence of the singer that the great German composers protested when they took up the barren forms of the Italian Opera, and filled them with new vitality. Mozart was one of the first of a brilliant group of dramatic composers to take the lead in this crusade against Italian artificiality. He was endowed by nature with the richest gift of musical productiveness ever possessed by man, and it is no wonder that the genuine touches of nature and dramatic pathos, which we still admire after the lapse of nearly a century, acted as a wholesome antidote on the minds of his contemporaries against the soporific effects of Italian vocalization. Still Mozart's genius was too decidedly of a musical character to attempt, or even wish for, an operatic reform on the basis of poetry. To him also the opera appeared, like the symphony or sonata, as an entirely musical formation, in which the addition of poetry seemed of importance only as suggesting opportunities for the display of the powers of his own art. He would never have approved of the slightest concession of musical prerogative in favour of dramatic economy.

Neither can we be surprised at seeing Mozart adopt the whole apparatus of the opera seria. It was not in his tender and unpolemical nature to destroy established forms with the sword of the reformer; he could only make us forget the narrowness of these fetters. His importance for the development of dramatic music consists in his having shown and increased its capability of rendering poetic intentions. Of the greatest interest, moreover, is the fact that even he was not able to

write beautiful and impressive music to dull and unsuggestive words.

The comparison with this view of 'La Clemenza di Tito' and 'Don Giovanni,' or of 'Così fan Tutte' and 'Figaro,' proves more clearly than philosophical argument could do that music, even in the hands of a Mozart, depends for its highest effects on the assistance of its sister art. "And thus," Wagner says, "it would have been Mozart, the most absolute of all musicians, who would have solved the problem of the opera long ago; that is, who would have assisted in producing the truest, the most beautiful, and most perfect drama, if he had met with a poet whom he as a musician would only have had to assist. But such a poet he unfortunately was never to find." This sentence may at the same time serve as a test of the veracity of those who affirm that Wagner has nothing but abuse for Mozart and the earlier composers generally.

Very different from Mozart's unpremeditated and entirely spontaneous effort is the way in which Gluck approached the problem of settling the balance between music and poetry in the opera. The tendency of his works was of a decidedly reformatory character, and the principle which he carried out in his music, and to which he gave utterance in his writings, was, that the task of dramatic music is, and is only, to accompany the different phases of emotion indicated by the words, and that its position towards poetry is therefore of a subordinate kind. By that principle the immoderate influence of the singer was made impossible for evermore: he was henceforth to be the mouthpiece of the

poet, and consequently had to take the greatest possible care in conveying the full poetical meaning of his song to the audience. By this means the declamatory element became of the highest importance for the composer as well as the performer, and the recitative, in which this element finds its fullest expression, was brought by Gluck to an unequalled degree of perfection. A further progress marked by his reform is the greater consideration paid to the dramatic economy of the libretti. Frequent and continued interruption of the action by an uncalled-for display of absolute music was made all but impossible. The revolutionizing tendency of such a principle was felt keenly by the adherents of the old system, and the hatred of the two parties became evident when their two champions, Piccini and Gluck, met face to face. The celebrated war between Gluckists and Piccinists in Paris (*circa* 1777) is too well known to require further mention here. The battle-cry of Gluck may be summed up in the following words, which occur in his celebrated dedication of 'Alceste' to the Grand Duke of Tuscany :—

“Je chercherai à reduire la musique à sa véritable fonction, celle de seconder la poésie pour fortifier l'expression des sentiments et l'intérêt des situations, sans interrompre l'action et la refroidir par des ornements superflus.” This programme might almost literally be adopted by the disciples of the modern school, and the reproaches aimed at what was then the Music of the Future equally remind one of the critical utterances of which Wagner has been and is still the object.

But beyond this capability of raising the indignant

alarm of critical worthies, the artistic consequences of Gluck's and Wagner's works have not as much in common as is generally believed. It is true that Gluck already felt the necessity of a perfect unity between music and poetry, but he never intended to bring about this desirable result by surrendering any of the strict forms of his own art. The consequence was that the poet was bound even more to adapt his work to the intentions of the composer, and that the latter remained practically the omnipotent ruler of the operatic stage.

The high condition of the contemporary spoken drama in France had been of considerable influence on Gluck's creation. He wrote, or rewrote, his most important works for the opera in Paris and to French words; and it is not a matter of surprise that the immediate results of his career were more distinctly discernible in France than in his native country. The Grand Opera in Paris was swayed for a long time by the great German master's traditions, continued by a school of highly accomplished artists. The representative names of this school are Méhul, Cherubini, and Spontini (the latter two, although Italian by birth, living under the mighty spell of French nationality in the same degree as we have seen it repeated in our own days in Meyerbeer), whose place in the history of their art will be secured for ever by the additional dramatic power and intensity which music owes to their efforts. Still the traditional encumbrances of the drama by the established musical forms remained unshaken by them.

To those already mentioned we have to add two more attempts at the regeneration of the opera made at almost

the same time in two different countries. Italy, the cradle of the divine art, was to recover once more her position at the head of musical Europe. Rossini, the spoiled son of the Muse, sallied forth with an army of bacchantic melodies to conquer the world,—the breaker of thought and sorrow. Europe by this time had got tired of the pompous seriousness of French declamation. It lent but too willing an ear to the new gospel, and eagerly quaffed the intoxicating potion which Rossini poured forth. Looking back with calmer eyes at the enormous enthusiasm with which Rossini was received by our grandfathers, we are almost at a loss to discern the causes for such an unequalled success. It requires indeed all the patience of an English audience to endure now-a-days a performance of ‘*Semiramide*,’ or any of Rossini’s serious operas except ‘*Guillaume Tell*.’ The recitativo secco is treated by him with all the dryness which that ominous name implies, and the melodious structure, mostly founded on dance-like rhythms, verges often on the trivial. Only rarely does the swan of Pesaro rise with the dramatic power of the situation to a commensurable height of passionate impulse. But Rossini knew his public, and he knew equally well his own resources; prudent, as most Italians are, he did his best to profit by the chances of the situation. What he could do, and did admirably well, was to open the rich mines of melodious beauty with which nature had endowed him, and which it is so easy to augment and develop in a country whose very language is music, and where the gondolieri chant the stanzas of Tasso to self-invented tunes. This principle of absolute melodious-

ness, as Rossini carried it out to its extreme, combined with the charming freshness of his humour, was well adapted to silence the objections of graver criticism in the universal uproar of popular applause. It need scarcely be added, that the pretended reform of dramatic music on the basis of Rossini's absolute tune was a total failure in all respects.

Almost contemporary with his great success, and to a certain extent in opposition to it, was another movement, much purer in its artistic aims and very different in its lasting consequences. Karl Maria Von Weber stood at the head of this movement, which took its rise from the strong romantic and national feeling pervading at the time all the ranks of German society and literature. It is a remarkable fact that the composer of 'Der Freischütz' had set to music the war songs of Körner and Schenkendorf, which roused and expressed the patriotic indignation against the yoke of the first Napoleon. Closely connected with this national elevation was the revival of mediæval and popular poetry with its sweet odour of forest and meadow, and all this Weber now embodied in his dramatic creations. Thus the first essentially new and highly important addition was made to the resources of the opera, as Mozart left it. Rossini's cantilena, although sparkling with originality, was in form and essence nothing but a reproduction of the Italian aria of the last century. Weber's melody, on the contrary, was founded entirely on the tune of the Volkslied, and to its close connection with the inexhaustible and ever new creating power of popular feeling it owed the charm of its delightful

freshness. Every passion and sentiment within the range of this pure and simple language Weber expressed with incomparable beauty ; only where the grand pathos of dramatic action demands a higher scope of musical conception, do the limits of his power become obvious. For the foundation of his dramatic production after all was melody ; melody quite as absolute, although much purer and nobler than that of Rossini ; and the amalgamation of music and poetry, by which alone a pure dramatic effect is attainable, was not to be found on this basis. The new element of national and popular colouring in music led in a different direction to what has been called the national or historic opera ; of which Auber's ' *Muette de Portici*,' and Meyerbeer's ' *Huguenots*,' are the two most perfect specimens.

Surveying once more the different stages through which we have accompanied the opera, from its modest beginning in the sixteenth century to the present day, we notice an enormous progress in the variety and intensity of its means of expression, but scarcely any change in the relative position of poetry and music, of which the latter was from beginning to end considered the sovereign principle imposing its own conditions on the sister art. The problem of a harmonious union of the two elements could not be solved in this manner.

It might be called a kind of Nemesis that in the highest stage of music in its separate existence, in the symphony, the demand for a poetic inspiration was felt at first, and that it was Beethoven, the greatest musical creator of all times, who was to acknowledge the rights of poetry, and usher in the new epoch of what may still

be called the "Music of the Future." It must be confessed that before him his art had been in a state of unconsciousness of its own powers and duties. None of the great composers had taken a higher aim than that of displaying the beauties of music within its own limits, that is in the domain of sound. Hence the wonderful variety of melodic and harmonic combinations in the old Italian masters; hence the prodigious skill in the polyphonous texture of Bach's and Handel's counterpoint. The growth and climax of emotions which these beautiful sounds might convey to the mind remained a secondary consideration, and wherever such emotions were condensed into words their divergence from the accompanying music was not always avoided by the greatest masters.

This was in fact unavoidable as long as the musical conception preceded in time and importance the poetical idea, whether or not expressed in distinct words. Not so in Beethoven. In all the bliss of musical creation he betrays a longing for something of which he himself was scarcely aware, but which he descried with the unconscious divination of genius, and the marks of which are traceable in the works of his last and grandest period. He was the first to condense the vague feelings which were all that music had hitherto expressed into more distinctly intelligible ideas. He even brings the song of birds, the thunder, and the murmuring brook before the ear, not as a portrait of nature, but as at once a suggestion and embodiment of the feelings which would be called up by them: '*Mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei*,' as he wrote himself at the

head of his 'Pastoral Symphony.' In Schopenhauer's parallel between the act of composing and a dream, this phase of Beethoven's artistic creation would represent the transition between sleeping and waking, where the recovering senses supply the mind with images from the outer world to clothe its dream which was naked and shapeless. Indeed there are passages in Beethoven's later instrumental works, such as long distinct recitatives, which can be explained only by the presence of some occult idea struggling for self-consciousness or, if it may be, expression. This idea being previous to all musical conception, the forms of absolute music had to submit to its harmonious expansion, and in this way the spell of their unlimited sway was broken for ever. It therefore was Beethoven who restored the true relations of the two arts, which henceforth became inseparable. The possibility of music for the sole sake of sonorous beauty has virtually ceased to exist, and any composer with higher aspirations than those of a genre painter without subject or artistic purpose has to consider it his task to express a poetical idea by means of his sounds. It is the part of music to receive this idea, and to bring it forth again idealised and raised to its own sphere of pure passion. "For music," as Wagner expresses it, "is a woman; — the essence of a woman's nature is love, but this love is receptive, and surrenders itself unconditionally."

The result of Beethoven's gigantic reform for the opera is at once visible. Music in its new position could no longer attempt to fetter the organic growth of the drama by imposing upon it conditions strange to its

nature. Henceforth the art of sound was limited to its own sphere of intensifying the poet's conceptions by means of its ideal powers. It was not given to Beethoven himself to make the one last step to the music-drama, perhaps only because he did not find a poem suited to his purpose. But it was he who showed the capability of music for this task, not by his single opera, which belongs to an early stage of his career, but by the works of his last period, and foremost of all by his 'Ninth Symphony,' the sublime accompaniment of some immense drama of which mankind itself, with all its doubts, pains, and joys, is the hero. Wagner calls the 'Ninth Symphony' the last that was ever written, and seems to have little hope of a further progress of music in its separate sphere.

With the last-mentioned view as with many of Wagner's opinions the present writer is not able to agree. At the same time it is difficult not to perceive the power and consistency of the historic sketch which as far as the limits of space would allow has been condensed in the foregoing remarks. It is equally impossible to deny that amongst the various movements which in modern music have sprung from Beethoven's last works, the dramatic one headed by Wagner himself is the most prominent. Of the definite appearance of Wagner's art as compared with that of other composers it would be impossible to convey an idea without entering into technicalities for which there is no room here. A few general indications must suffice.

There are two sides to Wagner's artistic movement ; one negative, reformatory, the other positive, recon-

structive. In the first instance he has abolished the petrified formalities which in the course of centuries had gathered round the dramatic poem. His operas are no longer a series of separate pieces of music, of duets, arias, and finales, having little reference to the action of the piece, and loosely connected with each other by the weak thread of dry recitative. His last and supreme purpose is the attainment of dramatic truth; and from this point of view we must consider the process of condensation and self-restraint to which Wagner ultimately sacrificed the whole apparatus of absolute musical forms.

The first excrescence of the opera which he attacked was the aria, which had, in the course of time, obtained undue importance. It was considered by both the composer and the singer a welcome test of their musical capacities, and had in consequence to be inserted into the piece without rhyme or reason, wherever those two omnipotent rulers of the unfortunate librettist thought fit. Wagner has totally abolished the aria proper. The whole weight of his musical power is placed in the dialogue as the chief bearer of the action, and is fashioned entirely according to the requirements of this action, rising with it where an occasion offers to the intensest fervour of lyrical passion, and always surrounding it with a flow of beautiful melody, but without ever descending to ill-timed sentimentality. It need not be added that other forms of absolute music such as ensemble and finale, etc., also were swept away by the force of this dramatic energy, but Wagner (and in this we have to recognize the positive and reconstructive side of

his revolution) has at the same time created a new form of musical expression, which originates from, and varies with, the impulse of dramatic passion; nay, which is nothing but this passion intensified and idealised by the divinest of arts.

One more point should be adverted to before we return to the sketch of Wagner's life. In his 'Opera and Drama,' Wagner urges the demand of a co-operation of all the arts, that is, of painting and architecture as well as of poetry and music, in the drama of the future. It is therefore not surprising to see that in his own attempts at realising this ideal work of art, considerable stress has been laid on the visible beauties of the action, as far as they may be attained by the painting of scenery and the grouping of human figures.

Wagner's stage directions are always of the minutest kind, and show all that skill and knowledge of scenic effects which so favourably distinguish him from most other German dramatists. But some honest Teuton critics stand amazed at this unwonted display of taste and elegance in the highest sense which to them savours of French *raffinement* and other dangerous and evil things. They summarily condemn the dazzling splendour of scenery as unworthy of the simplicity of fatherlandish manners and tastes. Such overstrained purism should be judged on its own merits. Wagner's scenic effects are made throughout subservient to the economy of the drama, with the organism of which they are connected as closely as music and poetry themselves. To compare this legitimate use of the appliances of the modern stage with the interruption of the action by

melo-dramatic spectacle, is an absurdity which requires no further refutation.

It must not be supposed that Wagner's time during the first years of his exile was entirely occupied with the speculative writings of which a brief and necessarily imperfect abstract has been given in the above remarks. It was indeed at this very period that he seriously commenced and partly completed the greatest, or at least the most colossal work which we owe to him. This is the Trilogy of the 'Ring of the Nibelung,' with an introductory piece, the 'Rhinegold,' which occupied him with several interruptions for more than a quarter of a century, and the successful performance of which at Baireuth in 1876 marks as it were the climax of his career. The first origin of the idea dates back to the Dresden period. During the composition of 'Lohengrin,' the old contest in Wagner's mind between the mythical and historical principles was finally decided. The representative of the former was Siegfried, the hero of the earliest of Teutonic myths; that of the latter Frederic the First, the great emperor of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, whose return from his sleep of centuries was for a long time connected by the German people with the revival of the old imperial glory. The victory remained with Siegfried. Wagner began at once sketching the subject. The work was planned on a much smaller scale than that on which it was ultimately executed. At first Wagner treated the 'Death of Siegfried' as a separate piece, but soon he found that the narrative portions necessary to explain the action would reach undue dimensions, and

were moreover so eminently dramatic in themselves as absolutely to require the addition of a second, or rather first, *i. e.* introductory piece. This was to be called 'Siegfried's Youth.' But here Wagner found his former experience repeated, and twice again he was compelled to condense the old epical types into dramatic creations, till at last the Trilogy of the 'Ring of the Nibelung' with an introductory piece, the 'Rhinegold,' was completed. The poetry in its present form was finished by the end of 1852, and during the three following years Wagner wrote the music to the 'Rhinegold' and to the first part of the Trilogy, the 'Valkyrie.'

In 1855 his work was interrupted by his acceptance of the conductorship of the London Philharmonic Society, whose concerts he directed for one season. The success was not such as might have been desired and expected. Wagner was recognised to be a first-rate conductor, and some members of his orchestra still speak of him with enthusiasm. But his reception on the part of the public, and more especially of the Press, was not favourable. His revolutionary tendencies, and his well-known aversion to Mendelssohn, were anything but a good introduction in a country where musical conservatism and Mendelssohn worship were at that time in their full swing. Wagner, on his part, did probably little to conciliate the susceptibilities of the public. Somehow the composer and English amateurs did not "get on" together, and Wagner left England at the end of the season. He returned to his solitude, and to his work, not however for the present to the 'Trilogy.'

It would be pleasant to think that Wagner's unsuccessful visit to this country suggested to him the subject of his new opera. Unfortunately there is no foundation for such a surmise beyond the fact that its scene is laid in England. 'Tristan and Isolde,' the name of the new work which occupied Wagner till 1859, is taken from the Celtic Mabinogion. It is by some (including the present writer) believed to be its composer's highest effort. Compared with its predecessor, 'Lohengrin,' it undoubtedly marks a great step in advance. According to his own assertion, Wagner wrote it with the concentrated power of his inspiration, freed at last from conventional operatic forms, with which he has broken here definitely and irrevocably. In 'Tristan and Isolde' is heard for the first time the unimpaired language of dramatic passion, intensified by an uninterrupted flow of expressive melody, which is no longer obstructed by the artificialities of aria, cavatina, etc. Here also the orchestra obtains that wide range of emotional expression, which enables it, like the chorus of the antique tragedy, to discharge the dialogue of an overplus of lyrical elements without weakening the intensity of the situation which it accompanies like an unceasing, passionate under-current.

After the stated facts it is not surprising to see that this music-drama has become the cause of much contention between the adherents of the liberal and conservative schools of music. Many people who greatly admire "certain things" in 'Tannhäuser' and 'Lohengrin' draw the line at 'Tristan and Isolde,' which, on the other hand, is regarded by the advanced party to be the

representative work of a new epoch in art. A musician's position towards the present work may indeed be considered the crucial test of his general tendency with regard to the past and the future. The subject of Wagner's tragedy is taken from the Celtic Mabinogi of 'Tristrem and Iseult,' which at an early age became popular amongst different nations, and found its most perfect mediæval treatment in Gottfried von Strassburg's epic. The modern poet has followed his original closely, pruning however and modifying where the economy of the drama seemed to require it. The episode of Rivalin and Blanche fleur and the early youth of Tristan remain unmentioned, and the scene opens on board the vessel destined to carry the unwilling Irish bride to old king Marke. Despair and love's disappointment, together with the insult inflicted upon her family by Tristan's victory over her kinsman Morolt, rankle in Isolde's bosom, and drive her to the resolution of destroying her own life, together with that of her enemy. Tristan is invited to drink with her the cup of atonement, but, without Isolde's knowledge, the prepared poisonous draught is changed by her faithful companion Brangaene for the love philtre. The reader will perceive at once the dramatic significance of this version compared with the old story, where the fatal potion is taken by mistake. This potion itself becomes in Wagner the symbol of irresistible love, which, to speak with the Psalmist, is "strong as death" and knows no fetter.

The further events of the drama are the consistent outgrowth of this tragic guilt. The second act contains

the secret meeting of the lovers, which has given the composer occasion for a duet, the pathos and sweetness of which remain unequalled in dramatic literature. Betrayed by Melot (who from the mischievous dwarf of older versions has become a knight and Tristan's false friend), they are surprised by king Marke, and Tristan, crushed by the sad reproach of his benefactor, makes a feigned attack on Melot, who in return pierces his defenceless breast. In the third and last act, Tristan is discovered lying in a state of unconsciousness at his castle in Brittany. His retainer Kurwenal has sent a messenger to Isolde, who once before had cured Tristan from the effects of a terrible wound. Tristan awakes, and on being told of Isolde's approach, tears in an ecstasy of joy the bandage from his wound, which causes his death at the moment when his lost love comes to his rescue. Isolde expires on the body of her lover.

As the opera has never been performed in this country, the reader would probably care little for the analysis of music which he has never heard, and probably will not hear for some time to come. For 'Tristan and Isolde' has not even in Germany attained popularity in the sense, for instance, that 'Lohengrin' has. Fragments of the work have however been performed at English concerts, and to these a few passing remarks may be devoted. The instrumental introduction, like that of 'Lohengrin,' is founded on a single motive of great impressiveness, which is worked out thematically into various shapes of melodious beauty. The same melody forms a prominent feature of the music-drama, and

appears as "leading motive" wherever the composer wishes to suggest the idea of the love potion, or, as we have seen, of irresistible passion. To its strains the names of Tristan and Isolde are uttered for the first time in fond whispering, just after the fatal draught has been drained. The theme may be considered representative of Wagner's later style of melody; although written in D minor its tonality is sufficiently undefined to give rise to the most varied harmonic transitions. It begins slowly and gravely, but its languor contains all the possibilities of intense passion which are developed in the course of the short piece. In an arrangement for concert performances, the overture is immediately followed by the final scene of the opera, the death of Isolde. It is conceived by the composer as a kind of sad echo of the happy union of the lovers in the second act. The principal motives of the latter scene reappear in the orchestral part as a remembrance of lost bliss accompanied by the broken utterances of the voice. At the same time one may recognise in this retrospective introduction of the same motives a symbolic expression of the lover's reunion after death, quite as simple and significant as the intertwining rose and vine which grow on their graves in the old story.

During the composition of 'Tristan,' Wagner never lost sight of the great work of national poetry which he henceforth considered to be the chief task of his life. The music to 'Siegfried' was begun even before 'Tristan and Isolde' was finished, and occupied Wagner with many interruptions of various kinds till 1869. One of these interruptions was a visit to Paris, one of the most

unsatisfactory incidents of Wagner's chequered career. Wagner gave three concerts at Paris early in 1860, the result being a violent paper war between the daily press and a few writers who discovered the genius of the German master through the cloud of national and artistic prejudices. Wagner's own voice also was heard in the contest, which had at least the effect of thoroughly attracting the attention of the French public towards the performance of 'Tannhäuser,' the arrangements for which had been the chief object of Wagner's visit. The event came off March 13th, 1861, at the Grand Opera, and resulted in one of the most complete *fiascos* of modern times. It is generally acknowledged that the riotous scene which occurred was to a great extent caused by political excitement. Prince Metternich, the Austrian Ambassador, had taken a great interest in the matter, and owing to his intercession the emperor had commanded the production of the work. This was sufficient for the members of the old aristocracy to damn the work thoroughly and *à priori*. The members of the Jockey Club accordingly mustered in full force on the first night, and their hootings and dog whistles were heard before the curtain was up. Wagner's defeat was thorough, but he was able to comfort himself with the thought that some of the best literary men in France, especially poets such as Gautier and Baudelaire, were amongst his warmest admirers. The history of his music in France is curious and soon told. Of his operas only 'Rienzi' has been given and received with approval; but fragments of his works played at M. Padeloup's concerts have been and are received with rapturous applause, in spite of the

national antipathy fanned into new flames when Wagner in extremely questionable taste published a burlesque on the siege of Paris soon after that event. Although practically banished from France, his operas have made a deep impression on the representative composers of the French school, Gounod and Massenet and Thomas, and most of all the highly gifted Bizet.

In the mean time Wagner's spirit was not broken by his ill success; he immediately returned to his work. The name of his new opera, the 'Meistersingers of Nürnberg,' has already been mentioned in these pages. It was originally intended as a sort of comic pendant to 'Tannhäuser,' in which the worthy burghers were to play an anything but flattering part in comparison with the knightly singers of Wartburg. But Wagner was to make the experience frequently observed in private life, and expressed by Dickens in the preface to 'Pickwick.' When he first became acquainted with the worthy poet citizens of the sixteenth century, only the uncouthness and pedantry of their ideal attempts struck him. As he continued to study their history and their works their sterling qualities became more and more apparent to him, and Hans Sachs and his fellow master-singers are in the final conception of the opera anything but ridiculous personages, although a dash of the comic is by no means wanting.

As the title indicates, the scene of the drama is laid in Nürnberg about the middle of the sixteenth century, a time when the art of poetry, abandoned by a decaying nobility, had been taken up with vigorous though somewhat pedantic enthusiasm by the artizans of the

rising cities. Nürnberg was the centre of the phase of domestic art, which in a manner became embodied in her renowned citizen, epitomised by himself in the immortal distich :

‘Hans Sachs was a shoe-
Maker and a poet too.’

On the rising of the curtain to the solemn tune of a chorale, we discover a large congregation assembled in the church of St. Catherine to celebrate the eve of the day of St. John, the patron saint of Nürnberg. Amongst the women is seated Eva, the beautiful daughter of Veit Pogner, the wealthy goldsmith, accompanied by her faithful nurse and dueña, Magdalen, somewhat elderly in appearance, but by no means above the tender weaknesses of youth, as we shall presently see. Leaning against a column, and gazing at the responsively blushing maiden, stands Walther von Stolzing, a young and noble knight, who has just arrived in the city where henceforth he wishes to dwell. He has seen Eva the day before for the first time, and a passionate love has been the result. Musically, this scene is of great beauty, and shows particularly Wagner’s incomparable skill of handling the motives of a situation in accordance with his dramatic purpose. The interludes between the phases of the chorale he makes expressive of the subdued passion of the lovers, preserving at the same time the sacred character of the ceremony even in these intervening notes, which indeed might be improvised by any organist at a Protestant service. The result is striking, an ideal effect being attained by means of strictest

realism. After the congregation has risen Walther approaches Eva, wholly intent upon hearing one word from her mouth—a word on which his life or death depend, the “yes” or “no” that decides if she is free to love him. The answer he receives is full of hope, but not free from fear. Her father has promised her hand to him who shall gain the prize in the singing contest on the morrow, provided the victor has the maiden’s assent. But none but a master-singer must she wed. In her fear and anxiety about the approaching danger Eva forgets all maidenly restraint. She responds to her lover’s passion. “You or none!” she exclaims, to the terror of her cautious confidante. This feature is characteristic of Wagner’s conception of love. All his female characters surrender themselves unconditionally, often at first sight. Love is to them an impulse, a fascination, which asks not whence or wherefore. At last it is decided that Walther himself is to try his fortune in the lists of poetry and song. At first his knightly pride somewhat hesitates at this kind of contest, at which, moreover, simple burghers are to act as umpires. But his love soon overcomes his scruples, the only remaining difficulty now being his total ignorance of the rules and doctrines of art such as Nürnberg master-singers teach and practise them.

At this juncture appears, very much *à propos*, David, the apprentice of Hans Sachs, in his twofold capacity of cobbler and poet, and at the same time deeply enamoured of the mature charms of Mistress Magdelen, a passion, one is sorry to add, not altogether free from material alloy in the shape of occasional provision

baskets clandestinely offered and rapturously received. The character of David is throughout both charming and original—a mixture of vanity and naïve selfishness, with an unlimited amount of warm-heartedness and sincere admiration for his master and his elderly sweetheart, such as only a German can combine, and only a German can describe. This many-sided individual is now charged by the two ladies with the rudimentary instruction of the knight in the poetic code of the master-singers, so as to enable the aspirant to make his application to be admitted to the order with at least some chance of success. David goes to his task with the full consciousness of superior knowledge, and patronizes the young nobleman in the most sublime manner, occasionally interrupted only by the untimely jocularities of his fellow-apprentices, who are arranging the seats for the meeting of the master-singers, that is to take place in the same church, according to immemorial custom. As to Walther he seems to reap little profit from his lessons, as will appear but too natural to the reader who has ever come across the so-called “*leges tabulaturæ*,” *i. e.* the codex of poetical law, either in the original or in Wagner’s faithful version. The master-singers now begin to appear, but before listening to their transactions the reader must be introduced to another important personage of the piece, Herr Sixtus Beckmesser, *alias* the incarnation of envy and retrograde pedantry, but a man of considerable importance, and esteemed by his fellow master-singers as a proficient worshipper of the muse. In the economy of the drama he is what Dumas somewhere calls “*le premier murmure*,” the first

fault-finder with anything not exactly fitting into the pigeon-holes of his narrow intellect—a critic, in fact, and in this case all the more odious as his desire also is bent on obtaining the hand of the beautiful Eva. The latter personal motive adds new zest to the antagonism which a man of his kind must feel for the fresh impulsive nature of Walther. Of the now assembled master-singers the young knight craves the honour of being received as one of them, and his demand is made dependent by the proud citizens on his poetical powers, which, according to rule, he is asked to prove on the spot by a song of his own composition.

Walther's first address and the song following it are written in the true spirit of the Volkslied, and have indeed greatly added to the popularity of the opera. Unfortunately Beckmesser is on this occasion appointed to the office of "Merker," which consists in marking on a slate the offences of the singer against the rules of the "Tabulature," and is therefore extremely well suited to his disposition. Before the knight has finished his song the slate has been covered with the white chalk marks of his indignation; and as the masters themselves are somewhat shocked at the innovations of the bold aspirant, they confirm the unfavourable opinion of their official critic. Hans Sachs alone has discovered the true flame of genius in the condemned effort, but his dissentient vote is crushed by a tumultuous majority. Walther's demand is refused, and the hopes of the lovers, founded on his success, seem to be blighted for ever. Fortunately a friend is not wanting in their need.

The second act contains the events following Walther's defeat. It is night, and the lovers in their despair decide upon immediate flight. But Hans Sachs, whose house is opposite that of Eva's father, and who has overheard their secret meeting, sees at once the fatal consequences of this step, and resolves to save them from their own rashness. This whole scene is both poetic and picturesque in design. The stately houses of Sachs and Pogner with their high Gothic gables in the background, together with the two lovers leaning face to face and half hidden from the bright moonlight by the branches of a large tree, form a beautiful picture in the Albrecht Dürer style. While Sachs is still pondering over the best means of frustrating their design a new actor appears on the scene in the person of Herr Beckmesser, intending to win the good graces of his lady-love by a proof of that skill which he trusts will gain him her hand on the morrow. Sachs, who sees that his presence will prevent the lovers at least from leaving their shelter at once, wishes to detain him, and after interrupting his serenade once or twice by a ballad of his own, at last consents to listen in silence, on condition of being permitted to mark Beckmesser's mistakes by beating with his hammer on his last. In this way the shoe advances faster than the song, poor Beckmesser being naturally put out of countenance by this kind of noisy criticism, and receiving, moreover, in answer to his remonstrances, the very words in which he had condemned Walther's song, now applied to his own production. But worse things are in store for this ill-fated singer. Magdalen

has previously been bidden by her mistress to counterfeit her semblance and appear at the window under which the performer stands, and David, the windows of whose chamber look on the same spot and who immediately recognises her, is greatly annoyed at seeing the owner of his affection listening to another's amorous song. As is not unusual in such cases, his jealous wrath turns first against the less guilty offender, whom he immediately approaches, bent upon assault and battery. The vociferous exclamations of the contending parties soon arouse the neighbours from their first sleep. Lights appear at the windows, burghers come forth in imperfect attire, the crowd grows rapidly, and, looking in vain for the disturbers of their rest, perhaps hardly recognizing each other in the darkness and confusion, they begin a general free fight on the grandest scale, illustrated musically by one of those enormous *ensembles* in which Wagner occasionally seems to expand the powers of polyphony to almost impossible dimensions. When, in the general turmoil, the lovers once more attempt to execute their scheme of flight, Sachs, who has never lost sight of them, grasps hold of the knight and drags him resistingly into his house, while Eva at the same time escapes to the protecting arms of her father. Thus ends the second act.

The opening scene of the third and last part of the drama is in perfect contrast with the tumultuous events just described. It is the calm of sabbath after the storm of passion. The prelude introducing it has, like the chorale on which it is founded, been

repeatedly performed in London, and has always impressed the audience deeply by its sustained rendering of contemplative, almost devotional, repose. The scene opens on the early morning of St. John's day, the same day on which Eva's fate is to be decided. Hans Sachs is discovered sitting in an arm-chair, and pondering over a huge tome of forgotten lore. In the ensuing monologue, no less than in his sayings and doings in the masters' assembly, the strong yet tender character of the man is disclosed. It is not a wholly imaginary one. It was in the true and steady yet progressive hearts and minds of men of this stamp that the new idea of the Reformation had its first stronghold. It was their justified pride and hard-earned opulence that raised the cities to a great political power, and induced the nobles to seek comfort and refinement within their walls, as Walther does in the present poem. Neither were their poetical efforts of a despicable order. They were not free from conventionalism and pedantry: a Beckmesser might thrive amongst them, but so might Hans Sachs with his true longing for the ideal.

The account of the further events of the drama must be reduced to the barest outline, much as one would like to dwell on the meeting of the lovers in Sachs's workshop, and the splendid music descriptive of the festive gathering on the Pegnitz meadow, where the prize-singing takes place, full of local colour and archæological detail, combined with most genuine ebullitions of popular merriment. The following are the circumstances, aided by which Sachs contrives the union of the lovers.

Walther tells Sachs of a beautiful dream; and is by him induced to condense it into verse and rhyme on the spur of the moment. Sachs writes down what the poet dictates, and only occasionally checks his enthusiasm by references to the dread "laws of the tabulature." The manuscript is found by Beckmesser, who, on recognizing Sachs's handwriting, takes it for the popular poet's own production, and begs his permission to make use of it at the forthcoming competition, having been prevented by the disaster of the previous night from preparing a song of his own. The permission is granted, with the additional promise on Sachs's part not to claim the authorship for himself. At the public singing, however, it turns out that Beckmesser has been wholly unable to comprehend, or even to read, the verses thus obtained. He stammers meaningless words; his confusion becomes worse confounded; at last he has to quit the singer's seat, amongst the derisive shouts of the audience. Sachs now suggests that he who can disentangle the threads of Beckmesser's bewildering production shall be proclaimed victor. Walther steps forward, sings his own song to his own melody, and is rewarded with the applause of the multitude, and the hand of the fair Eva.

The plot of the 'Master-singers' is of more than usual importance. It indeed seems to solve the difficult problem of the comic opera, or, in a wider sense, of comedy itself. Here we find all the elements of popularity — feasting, fighting, and love-making. Youth and beauty are duly united, while vice, after numerous buffetings, has to slink off ignominiously. But ideas of

deeper import are hidden under the surface of humorous enjoyment. The chief characters are types of historic truth, chief actors in the most important movement of modern times—the cause of rising Burgherdom v. Feudalism and Mediæval Darkness. No less important are the æsthetical truths insisted upon. Walther is the representative of natural impulse; the master-singers stand on their code of rules. The former conquers, but does not annihilate, the latter. When after his victory the young knight proudly rejects the honour of mastership offered to him he is rebuked by Sachs, who insists on the dignity which the muse conveys on her humblest worshippers. What Wagner wishes to point out is the necessity of continuity in art, that unceasing effort even of secondary power which is, as it were, the base and starting-point of individual genius. The right to break forms and despise rules he only possesses who masters them.

The latter principle is in a certain sense illustrated by the musical treatment of the ‘Master-singers,’ in which Wagner acknowledges the relative value of the knowledge of the old-established forms. The enemies of the composer look upon this fact as a kind of recantation and public repentance. It is nothing of the kind. Wagner, on the contrary, by making use of these forms for his poetic purpose, has shown highest freedom and consistency. The subject of his serious music dramas he has chosen from the mythical creations of former ages. His characters there are purely ideal, and their language must be as far as possible removed from the parlance of conventionalism. Very different from this, the comic element in the ‘Master-singers’ is, in accord-

ance with the very essence of humour, founded on the contrast between free passion and conventional pedantry. Hence we find that the most striking jocular effects are frequently produced by a clever persiflage of certain traditional modes of expression. Beckmesser delights in long-winded roulades and fioriture, and the turns and trills of David would do credit to any Italian singing-master. Moreover, the local and historical tone pervading the whole would have been utterly destroyed if the utterances of even the elevated characters had not to some extent been made to tally with the language of their period, which was not the language of pure passion. It is thus that Wagner makes ornaments of his chains, and attains the highest freedom of poetic purpose, where he seems entangled in the meshes of conventionalism. On the other hand, he has nowhere written more truly impassioned strains where pure emotion comes into play. In addition to this the score abounds with melodious beauties of the highest order. Amongst such it must here suffice to point out the three songs of Walther, the two chorales in the first and third acts (the latter to words by the real Hans Sachs), and the introduction to the third act. The quintet in the same act is a marvel of concerted music. The overture is a masterpiece of instrumental writing. In it the three themes representative of the moving ideas of the opera, the pompous dignity of the master-singers, the pert self-consciousness of their apprentices, and Walther's passionate wooing, appear in skilful contrapuntal combinations of at once poetic significance and musical beauty.

The 'Meister-singers' was finished about 1867, and performed in the next-following year at Munich. In the mean time Wagner's affairs had undergone another great change. In spite of the attacks of his enemies his fame had continued growing beyond the limits of his own country. In 1863 he undertook a concert tour through some of the most important German cities, and extending to St. Petersburg and Moscow; and everywhere the extracts from his works conducted by himself were received with enthusiasm. Still the German theatres avoided his later works, in spite of the established popularity of his four earlier operas. At last his living connection with the stage was re-established through means of his young and enthusiastic protector, King Ludwig II. of Bavaria, who in 1864 called him to Munich. Here, under the composer's immediate superintendence, 'Tristan and Isolde' was performed in 1865, followed, three years later, by the 'Master-singers' both under Dr. Von Bülow's able direction.

From his triumphs and his troubles at Munich—for the latter also were not absent—Wagner returned to his loneliness and his work in Switzerland. His full energy henceforth was concentrated on the completion and the preparations for an eventual performance of his 'Nibelungen.' It was natural that, in the actual condition of the German stage, with its motley programme of classic, romantic, French, German, Italian, serious, comic, and burlesque operas, a satisfactory representation of a work of this kind could not be expected. Wagner, therefore, for a long time despaired of the realization of his ideas, and strongly opposed the

performances of separate parts of his work attempted at Munich.

At last the late celebrated pianist, Charles Tausig, one of the master's most zealous adherents, in connection with a small number of his artistic friends, confidently decided upon appealing to the admirers of Wagner's art among his own and other nations for the necessary means of carrying out the composer's original idea, viz. to perform the 'Nibelungen' at a theatre to be erected for the purpose, and by a select company in the manner of a great national festival, and before an audience which in this way would be, like the artists themselves, entirely removed from the atmosphere of ordinary theatrical shows.

A scheme of such vastness appeared at first Utopian, and was indeed treated with scorn and ridicule by an inimical press. But, in spite of these attacks, the previous works of Wagner began to take a firmer and firmer hold on the mind of the public; the re-awakening of patriotic feeling after the French war may have contributed to direct the attention of the best amongst the German nation to a work so eminently national both in its sources and manner of execution. In reply to Tausig's call, Wagner societies for the purpose of raising the necessary funds were founded not only in all important German cities, but also in Brussels, Milan, London, New York, &c. The foundation stone of the Wagner Theatre at Baireuth was laid on the composer's birthday, May 22nd, 1872, on which occasion a remarkable performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony took place under Wagner's direction. The production of the

Trilogy itself was by various causes delayed till the month of August, 1876. Before turning to this remarkable event, perhaps the climax of Wagner's life, it will be necessary that we should pay such attention to the opus magnum itself as it will be possible to give it here. In order to convey an adequate idea of its musical structure, it would be all but indispensable to take recourse to numerous quotations in musical type which would be obviously out of place in a work of this kind. In their stead frequent reference to the vocal score of the Trilogy (published by Messrs. Schott and Co.) has been made for the benefit of readers intent upon careful study.

The first scene of the 'Rhinegold' is laid in the depths of the great river where the Rhine-daughters, lovely water-maidens, are watching a golden treasure, enjoying its gleam, but insusceptible to its baneful power over gods and men. A short instrumental introduction depicts the sound and motion of the deep. It is founded on the chord of E flat, given out at first in long-drawn notes, which soon dissolve themselves into shorter rhythmical formations, rising and falling alternately from the highest to the lowest octaves, like the murmuring waves of a rapid river. A suave theme is gradually developed, with the strains of which the three water-maidens accompany their merry gambols.

But their harmless joy is not to be of long duration. Alberich, the Niblung, ascends from his subterranean abode, and his arrival is at once announced in the orchestra by a new theme, the jerky abruptness of which indicates the nature of the mischievous dwarf. The introduction of a surreptitious G flat into the graceful

motions of the water-music ('Vocal Score,' p. 8) is a master stroke of graphic characterization. The scene which ensues, descriptive of the vain endeavours of the gnome to gain one of the maidens for his desire, is full of the most subtle touches of musical illustration. The amorous rage of Alberich and the mock tenderness with which the girls, each in her own characteristic way, receive his offers, are rendered in the most humorous vein. Flosshilde's answer, for instance, in its sweet, almost Italian softness, seems very nearly to resemble the expression of true passion, but for a slight touch of overstrained sentiment, which reminds us that all is put on, and that poor Alberich is to be jilted mercilessly when he thinks his happiness most secure. The easy grace with which these elementary beings are drawn by Wagner proves his dramatic vocation no less than the graver notes of passion which are to follow soon. For suddenly the glow of the hidden gold breaks through the waves, brightening their sombre green with a tinge of fire. The Rhine-daughters greet it with joyful acclamations. They tell the astonished dwarf of the power of the gold, which no one can wield without cursing the joys of love. Here we approach the key-note of the dramatic idea, and the musical themes become, accordingly, of the deepest meaning.

The reader may be referred more particularly to three "leading motives": the first intoned by the horns (p. 30), illustrative of the splendour of the Rhine-gold; the second of its power; and the third resembling in its solemn tone a sacred formula of Runic lore. To its sound the water-maidens explain to the dwarf that only

he can wield the power of the treasure who will renounce the bondage of love, cursing its joy—a hopeless case, the girls playfully add, for the love-sick dwarf. But Alberich, smitten with the hope of boundless power, utters the fatal curse to love's pleasure, and before the maidens can prevent it, lays hold of the treasure, with which he disappears. Night suddenly closes over the scene; the wailing cries of the Rhine-daughters are heard in the darkness. Thus the gold, which could be harmless only with the passionless children of Nature, is taken from their guard to work its baneful way amongst gods and men.

It remains to mention the weird music accompanying the rape of the gold by Alberich, and the complaints of the water-maidens sounding through the darkness at the end of this scene. The latter are illustrated by the identical strains of their joyful song; but, appearing here in a sad C minor transformation, continued by the orchestra in an interlude, which, founded on the melodious materials already alluded to, leads gradually into the second scene.

Wotan, the supreme god, is seen sleeping in a meadow on the slope of a high hill, Fricka his wife sitting by his side. The rays of the rising sun are reflected from the battlements of a splendid edifice, which stands on a high rock in the background. It is Walhall, the castle built for Wotan by the giants, as at once the symbol and stronghold of his power. This power of the gods is rendered in the grand melody opening the scene, which may be called the "Walhall motive" ('Vocal Score,' p. 52). But not even to the immortal gods is it given to taste

bliss unalloyed by sorrow. Fricka awakes her spouse from his fond delusions ; she reminds him that Freia, the goddess of youth, has been given to the giants as a security for the reward of their labour. Unless the price asked by them can be paid, the lovely goddess must become the prey of the rude workmen, for Wotan has bound himself to them by a solemn oath, and the existence of his reign is founded on the inviolability of plighted promises. As if to remind him of this limit of his power, the orchestra intones a solemn theme which might be called the "law or bond motive." It appears first as the scale descending from B flat to the octave C natural ('Vocal Score,' p. 55), and occurs again frequently in the course of the piece, being recognizable by its peculiar rhythmical formation. Another important melody of great sweetness which first occurs in this scene is that which marks the entrance of Freia, the goddess of youth ; to its sounds she implores the assistance of Wotan against her pursuers, whose clumsy footsteps, following the lovely maiden, are characterized by a heavy rhythmical phrase in the orchestra. The contrast between the natures here brought in contact is thus expressed by the music with an intensity wholly unattainable by verbal explanation.

Like Shylock, the giants stay on their bond, and the unanswerable force of that plea is at once illustrated by the above-mentioned "bond-motive" in the orchestra. To break his promise would be suicidal on Wotan's part, and anxiously the god looks out for help and advice from him who first persuaded him to conclude the fatal bargain with the giants. This is Loge, the god of fire and the

Mephistopheles of northern mythology. Wotan has formed him into permanent shape and personality, but he still retains the wildness of his native element, and hates his brother gods, who in return look on him with undisguised suspicion. The chromatic motive expressive of his character resembles the fitful flickering of fire ('Vocal Score,' p. 78). In Loge's flames the splendour of Walhall is doomed to perish, and it is also by his means that the moral guilt of the gods, which already in the Eddic poems is the cause of their fate, is brought about. Asked to find ransom for Freia, he declares that the only thing in the world precious enough to reconcile man with the loss of lovely woman is the gold robbed from the Rhine-daughters by Alberich and formed into a ring, at once the symbol and means of unlimited power.

Loge's speech descriptive of the power of the gold, out-rivalling even "the worth and joy of woman," is one of the most striking pieces of declamation dramatic music can show. Its effect on the gods is instantaneous, and the gradations of their individual desire are rendered by the music with the subtlest touches. Fricka, in a sweet melody especially her own, asks if the gold would serve to adorn a woman's beauty and to attach to her the inviolable fidelity of her husband. Wotan thinks of power and splendour. Donner and Froh, two mighty gods who have hastened to the rescue of their sister, yield to the same irresistible desire. Even the giants Fafner and Fasolt express their clumsy acquiescence in the ransom proposed. On Wotan's proudly refusing to rob Alberich of the gold for their benefit,

the giants threaten to carry off Freia, and are soon discovered heavily threading their way down to the valley of the Rhine, heedless of the complaints of their lovely victim. As the goddess of youth disappears in the distance a pale mist rises, which gives an elderly appearance to the gods. Loge reminds them that they have not tasted that day of Freia's apples, which alone can secure them from the wasting influence of time. He assails the gods with his satire, mocking each of them with the musical phrase, indicative of his or her power or beauty. The motive which represents the eternal youth vouchsafed by Freia's apples is made use of in the same ironical spirit. At length Wotan's pride gives way. The giants are called back, and the supreme god consents to descend to Alberich's nebulous kingdom, and to acquire possession of the gold by fair means or foul. We here touch upon the second tragic keynote of the drama. Wotan, as the awarder of justice, is bound to restore the treasure to the rightful owners, the daughters of the Rhine; but, stung by selfish desire, he at first covets the gold for himself, and afterwards relinquishes it to the giants for the recovery of eternal youth. Thus the gods infringe the laws which alone can secure them from the powers of darkness and chaos; they become subject to the curse attaching to the gold, and their final doom is henceforth inevitable.

A short interlude depicts in broad touches the descent of Wotan and Loge to the subterraneous realm of Alberich the Niblung. A hammering rhythm in the orchestra, enforced by eighteen tuned anvils behind the scenes, tells us that we are approaching the country

of the smiths. Alberich by the magic of his ring has subjected the cunning dwarfs to his unlimited power. For him they must ransack the bowels of the earth to find new treasures for his insatiable desire. His brother Mime, a skilful artificer, has been compelled by him to contrive a mystic cap or helmet called the Tarn-cap, which, like Perseus's helmet in Greek mythology, enables the wearer to take the form of any living thing. All this is told the inquiring gods by Mime, who bitterly complains of his brother's cruelty. This narrative in itself is an exceedingly interesting piece of music. Accompanied by the anvil rhythm, he sadly recalls his former happy life as a careless smith, working with his comrades pretty trinkets for their wives. The melody of his song is very simple, and reminds the hearer somewhat of the Volkslied or popular ballad. A fine touch of humorous instrumentation has been pointed out by a German critic. When Mime mentions the tarn-helmet, and adds how he was in hopes of cheating his brother out of its possession, his vain attempt at cunning is charmingly parodied by the semi-quavers of the somewhat clumsy fagotti. The satire is quite as perspicuous, although not quite as broad, as the celebrated horn by which Mozart supplements Figaro's tale of his imaginary conjugal troubles.

The entire scene is conceived in a thoroughly humorous spirit. The flagellations of the cruel Alberich and the pitiful shrieks of his victims are depicted by the music in the most realistic manner. In the ensuing dialogue between Wotan and the Niblung, the contrast is particularly remarkable between the latter's spasmodic

outbreaks and the lofty though passionate bearing of the higher god. The first notes of Wotan's address (p. 128) betray at once the dignified reserve of the gentleman in his unwilling intercourse with the clown. Even Loge's restlessness is vastly different from the coarser accents of the dwarf. In the economy of the trilogy the present scene holds a position analogous to the satyr-drama of the antique tragedy.

But this humorous playfulness is soon to be interrupted by graver accents. Alberich, recognizing the gods, threatens them with the attack of the powers of darkness, which the possession of the ring has for ever subjected to his command. Wotan's wrath is excited, but Loge quiets him, and in an address full of deceitful flattery, charmingly rendered by the music, at once praises and seems to doubt the miraculous power of the tarn-helmet. Alberich is caught in the snare thus laid for his vanity. The orchestra intones a strange melody, which sounds like some runic formula of conjuration, and instead of Alberich, we see an enormous worm wriggling slowly on the ground. At Loge's bidding the charm is applied a second time, Alberich appearing now as a toad, the hopping of which is like the slow movements of the worm on the first occasion, graphically illustrated by the music. A change of tempo from *moderato* to *presto* announces that the gods have torn the helmet from Alberich's head, and are dragging the powerless dwarf from the dark recesses of his realm. On passing the smithies we once more hear the monotonous rhythm of the anvils.

During a short interlude the scene gradually changes, and we again breathe the atmosphere of the high mountains. Here Alberich is compelled to give up his ring to the gods; but before doing so he attaches his curse to the gold, baneful henceforth to its possessor. This important feature of the old myth, the moral significance of which is easily perceptible, has again been rendered by Wagner in a motive full of mysterious import ('Vocal Score,' p. 169).

But his threats are unheeded by the triumphant Wotan. The treasure which by Alberich's command the Niblungs have carried to the top of the mountains the god destines for Freia's ransom; the ring he is determined to make his own. The clouds hovering on the peaks of the hills now begin to disperse. The tender chords of Freia's motive announce the approach of the lovely goddess, full of hope to be soon released from the oppressors who accompany her. Fricka, Donner, and Froh also appear to witness the desired event, and the paying of the ransom is at once begun. According to custom immemorial the prisoner is placed between two poles, and the intervals are filled up with gold, which completely hides her from sight. The whole treasure is thus consumed, and yet a chink remains uncovered through which the giants espy their victim. To fill it up Wotan unwillingly yields the tarn-helmet, but when at last the ring is demanded for the same purpose, he sternly refuses to part with it. The giants threaten to break off the bargain, and the utmost consternation prevails amongst the gods, when, from the innermost recesses of the mountain, rises the

mysterious form of Ertha, the pantheistic symbol of the universe, the timeless and spaceless mother of god and man. In the melody which accompanies her words we recognize the gradual rising of the waves in the orchestral prelude, a significant circumstance establishing the affinity of the primeval sources of the world. In measured words of gravest import she warns Wotan of the danger threatening him through his wrongful desire. At last the god is overcome. As Ertha disappears from his sight he with a sudden effort throws the ring to the giants, and the jubilant notes of the orchestra announce the release of Freia and the joy of the gods.

It remains to point out the fine psychological use to which the "leading-motives" are turned in this scene. While Wotan is still under the power of the gold, the "ring-motive" in the orchestra paints the struggle of his soul; his moral effort in parting with the ring is powerfully expressed by the "bond-motive," which in a manner connects his act with the moral order of the world, of which he is the guardian and representative. Ertha's warning was not in vain, as the gods now experience with silent amazement. For no sooner have the giants taken hold of the ring than they begin to grudge its possession to each other. In the ensuing quarrel Fafner kills his brother Fasolt, and tears the ring from his dying grasp. The musical conception of this extremely powerful scene is founded on a combination of the "ring-motive" and the formula of Alberich's curse, the former being representative of the irresistible attraction of the gold, the latter of its baneful power.

We now come to one of those pieces of graphically descriptive music which, no less than the accents of human passion, evince Wagner's dramatic vocation. Donner, the god of thunder, collects the mists covering the mountains into a black cloud, which with a stroke of his hammer he dispels in brilliant lightning. The gathering of the thunder-storm up to the fortissimo of the actual outbreak is rendered by the wild rhythms of triplets and semi-quavers in the strings. When the fury of the storm is expended the wind instruments commence a quiet, long-drawn melody in G flat, which indicates the rainbow thrown by Froh across the valley. On this rainbow as on a bridge the gods now enter Walhall, the splendid palace built by the giants. Calm, joy, and contentment have returned to their bosoms; only Wotan lingers: his heart is heavy with thoughts of Ertha's warning and the curse attaching to the gold which at least temporarily has been his own. Suddenly we hear an energetic theme in the orchestra ('Vocal Score,' p. 207). A bold thought, a great resolution, seems to strike the supreme god. Proudly he ascends the bridge, and, undisturbed by the complaints of the Rhine-daughters in the depth of the valley, or by Loge's muttered threats, the gods proceed to their celestial abode. The grand chords of the "Walhall-motive" bring the 'Rhinegold' to a splendid musical conclusion.

The 'Rhinegold' might be compared to the prologue in Heaven prefixed to Goethe's 'Faust'; for it foreshadows in the minds of divine beings the sufferings and aspirations of the human actors. In the present

drama, however, the gods are not placid contemplators of the events to follow; they are themselves tragic objects, and their own fate, nay, their very existence, is at stake. The germs of the whole trilogy may indeed be recognized in the introductory piece, and it seems for that reason to be appropriate, before transferring the action from the divine to the human sphere, to sum up in a few words the leading features of the dramatic idea, without the consideration of which any attempt at musical analysis would be fruitless.

The gold, or, which is the same in a moral sense, the thirst for gold, is the fatal element in the drama. Wotan is subject to its curse, and foresees his final doom from the powers of darkness, in whose possession he has been compelled to leave the ring. He himself is debarred by his promise from wrenching it from the enemy's grasp. This can only be done by the god-inspired action of a hero, who by his own free impulse, and regardless of law human or divine, shall restore the treasure to the depth of the Rhine. This idea of the world-redeeming power of free impulse, one might almost say of heroism, in Carlyle's sense, is the grand background on which the human events of the trilogy are reflected; it is a tragic idea because the individual in this ideal strife must perish. In this sense Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried and Brynhild, become representatives of that pure fire of human aspiration which cannot be quenched by misfortune. They are crushed by a blind fate, but the essence of their being remains untouched by its strokes; they die, but they conquer. All this is virtually contained or at least foreshadowed

in the 'Rhinegold,' and for that reason it has been here dwelt upon at greater length than its position as an introductory piece would seem to warrant. The trilogy proper must be treated with comparative brevity. A full account would far exceed the limits and the purport of this work.

The 'Valkyrie,' the first drama of the trilogy, contains the love and death of Siegmund and Sieglinde, the Volsungs. To create the inspired hero, who alone can save him from the inimical power of the gold, Wotan has taken human form. To him a wife has borne twin children, Siegmund and his sister Sieglinde. With his son he has roamed through the forest, both clad in the skin of wolves, and the name of the Volsungs has become the terror of their enemies. Suchwise Siegmund has been prepared for the great task assigned to him. From his sister he has been separated in infancy by the hands of murderous enemies, who have burned his house, killed his mother, and carried off the maid. Wotan also has left him. Finding after a fight the empty wolf-skin of his father in the woods, Siegmund believes him to be slain. He stands alone in the world, dreaded by many, loved by none, but undaunted by the frowns of Fortune.

The orchestral introduction to the 'Valkyrie' in D minor is of a wild, stormy character. The triplets of the violins denote the beating of hail and rain on the leaves of tall trees, the rolling phrase in the double basses being suggestive of the angry voice of thunder. Siegmund, on his flight from the overpowering numbers of his foes, enters the house of Hunding and sinks down

exhausted by the hearth. Sieglinde, who against her will has been wedded to Hunding, enters and gazes on the stranger. She refreshes her guest, who is soon revived by her care. The musical treatment of this scene is of great tenderness. A grave melody indicates the lonely sadness of the Volsung, but a motive of tenderest pathos expresses the feeling of love which at first sight unites the pair. It always appears in two parts, betokening thus the inseparable duality of the emotion ('Vocal Score,' p. 13).

Another Love-motive of equal beauty belonging to this scene deserves mention, as a specimen of that sustained melodiousness which of all Beethoven's followers Wagner alone shares with that master ('Vocal Score,' p. 13).

The sweet converse of the pair is interrupted by Hunding's arrival announced by an ominous rhythmical phrase in the orchestra. His question Siegmund answers with a tale of his adventures—a tale which in its simple musical structure again reminds one of that true fount of artistic inspiration, the popular song. From Siegmund's relation Hunding gathers that his own kin are the enemies whom Siegmund has fought that day. Rising, he vows revenge. For one night his hospitality shall shelter the foe, but on the morrow he must prepare for mortal combat. Weaponless, and almost despairing, Siegmund remains in the dark. But the tale of his childhood has wakened old memories in Sieglinde's bosom. Returning to him, she shows him the hilt of a sword in the stem of the tree round which the primitive dwelling is built. On the woeful day of her marriage,

she says, a stranger entered the festive assembly. Drawing his sword he smote it into the tree-trunk from which none of the guests could move it. From the Walhall motive accompanying her tale we know that this stranger was Wotan himself who thus left the sword for his son in his highest need.

"This is the sword," Sieglinde continues; "for none but thee was it destined." But soon these warlike thoughts give way to tenderer thoughts. An irresistible power seemed to draw the two together when first they gazed in each other's eyes. Now that they are alone in a splendid night of spring their hearts beat stronger and stronger; closely they stand in each other's embrace. The lyrical pathos of the situation has here given Wagner an opportunity for a song as sweet as music and poetry ever combined to bring forth ('Vocal Score,' p. 47).

To Sieglinde's question Siegmund, in the further course of the scene, discloses his real name and origin. "If thou art Siegmund," she exclaims, "this sword has been given to thee by our father Volsung." Whereat he with a mighty wrench tears the weapon from the stem. The remainder of the scene is taken up by the resumption of the passionate love-strains interrupted by the last-named incident.

A few words should be added in explanation of an episode, at first sight so strange, not to say shocking, to modern feeling, as the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde. It is, in the first instance, a necessary ingredient of the fundamental idea of the story that Siegfried, the future offspring of their union, should

have the unmixed blood of Volsung—that is, of Wotan the god—in his veins so as to be able to fulfil his mission. Rather than omit the incident Wagner has chosen to treat it in the open and therefore chaste spirit of the Northern myth. It should, moreover, be remembered that we are not dealing with ordinary men and women, but with the children of a god, mythical beings, that is, who have hardly yet emerged from the stage of natural forces. Who has ever been shocked at the amours of the Greek divinities on account of their being within the forbidden degrees of relationship, or at the intermarriage of the children of Adam and Eve which the Pentateuch implies?

In the ensuing combat between Hunding and Siegmund, Wotan's heart is on the side of his son. But Fricka, the protectress of marriage vows, insists upon the punishment of the adulterer, and Wotan has to bow down and relinquish his own hero and saviour. Here again we meet with the "Bond-motive" from the 'Rhinegold,' which shows the subjection of the highest will to the higher force of established law. It is now that Brynhild, the Valkyrie or sword-maiden, and favourite daughter of Wotan, takes the prominent place in the action which she is henceforth to occupy till the end of the trilogy. She is the heroic type of womanhood sought for in all his previous works, and here at last found by Wagner. Touched by Siegmund's misfortune, she tries to protect him in spite of Wotan's command, and when the hero falls, pierced by the spear of the god, she exposes herself to severest punishment by saving Sieglinde and the babe in her bosom.

Brynhild's flight from Wotan's wrath, the wild songs and exclamations of her sister Valkyries, who vainly try to shelter her, and the passionate reproaches of the god—all this has given rise to a scene of weird beauty, such as it would be impossible to describe in few words, or indeed in any words. The closing scene of the 'Valkyrie' is again designed on the grandest scale. Wotan's fury is at first indomitable. He threatens to divest Brynhild of her godhood, and lay her in magic slumber by the wayside, the easy prey of the first comer. But a voice in his own bosom soon pleads in her favour. His heart was with Siegmund, although it was through his hand the hero fell. In trying to avert the Volsung's fate, Brynhild sought her father's salvation against his command. He cannot repeal his sentence, but he can and will protect his child from dishonour. As he closes Brynhild's eyes with a kiss, he describes with his spear a circle round the rock on which she lies, and immediately Loge, in his primal form, rises up, a wall of burning fire. Only he who dares stride through the flame, only a hero, shall possess Brynhild. The chief theme on which the last scene is founded, is that of Loge appearing here with a boldness of graphic treatment which by purists might be called decorative. The answer to such a charge is, that with Wagner scenic, as well as musical, effects are always the outgrowth of the dramatic situation, and that in the present case, for instance, the emotional basis of the whole—paternal love and grief at parting—is never lost sight of in the picturesque beauty of the scene.

'Siegfried,' the second drama of the trilogy, is the

apotheosis of youth. Everything in it is young and fresh, from the hero to the little bird of the forest, whose language is no secret to one brought up in immediate contact with nature. The argument of the piece may be summed up in few words. Sieglinde, Siegfried's mother, on her flight from Wotan's wrath, had come to the hut of Mime, who lives in a dense forest to watch Fafner and his treasure; the giant, by means of the 'tarn-helmet,' having taken the shape of an enormous dragon. Mime recognizing the pieces of the sword, and knowing the miraculous power of the babe to be born by Sieglinde, has given her shelter in the hope of recovering the treasure by means of her son. Sieglinde dies at the birth of her child, and Siegfried grows up with the dwarf, who in vain tries to gain his affection; the youth is instinctively repelled by his assumed tenderness. Siegfried, as was said before, is emphatically young and unsophisticated. He is destined to do great things, but he does them with divine unconcernedness. From the pieces of his father's sword he welds himself a weapon; with it he slays Fafner the dragon and becomes possessor of the fatal treasure.

Immediately before thus wrenching the baneful ring from the powers of darkness, the unconscious youth sits under a tree listening to the singing of the wild birds. To this scene I particularly wish to draw the reader's attention. In an orchestral piece of almost symphonic import Wagner here describes the mysterious whirr and life of the forest. The whole idyllic intermezzo is replete with the sweetest charm of romanticism.

Siegfried kills Wotan's enemy, but the deed is done

by his own free impulse, unrestrained by laws human or divine. This becomes evident when, in the next scene, he cuts in two, with the same sword that has killed Fafner, Wotan's spear, which the god stretches out to prevent him from ascending Brynhild's rock. On this spear the laws of the universe are cut, and its destruction is symbolical of that of the old order of things. Henceforth Wotan resigns the world to the unimpaired impulse of youth, and returns to Walhall to await his final doom. The broken rhythm of the Bond-motive from the 'Rhinegold' (see 'Siegfried,' p. 246) denotes that Wotan's power and the law on which it was founded are gone for ever. Siegfried, in the mean time, follows the voice of his desire. Flames cannot stem his ardour. He enters Brynhild's abode, awakes her with a kiss, and in his embrace the Valkyrie forgets Walhall and its splendour. The impassible shield-maiden has become a loving woman. The duet between the lovers all but equals, in grandeur and beauty, that between Siegmund and Sieglinde in the 'Valkyrie,' from which it differs structurally by the concerted passages here introduced.

The four dramas of Wagner's 'Ring of Niblung' might be compared to the four movements of a symphony. 'Rhinegold' is the bright and brilliant first allegro; the 'Valkyrie' the passionate adagio; 'Siegfried' an impetuous scherzo; and the 'Dusk of the Gods' ('Götterdämmerung') a grand finale full of tragic darkness, but not without a gleam of hope at the end. The 'Dusk of the Gods' is preceded by two introductory scenes, one of which is the leave-taking of Siegfried

and Brynhild, a musical conception of grandest import. The hero has dwelt with the sword-maiden on her rocky fastness. She has taught his inexperienced youth the wisdom of her runes; her love has developed him; from an impetuous boy he has become a self-conscious man. Such is the high idea of woman's mission in the old Teutonic myths. On leaving Brynhild in search of new adventures he gives her the ring of the Niblung as a pledge of his fidelity. We next meet him at the court of Gunther, a mighty king on the Rhine. A love-philter given to him makes Siegfried forget Brynhild and enamours him with Gutrune, Gunther's blooming sister.

The magic potion has been administered by the advice of Hagen, Gunther's half brother, and son of Alberich the Niblung, for whom he wishes to regain possession of the ring. To obtain Gutrune's hand Siegfried consents to gain for Gunther possession of Brynhild, whose very name has been erased from his memory by the potent charm. This he achieves by assuming Gunther's form, the metamorphosis being effected by means of the magic helmet from Alberich's treasure. When Brynhild subsequently meets Siegfried in his own form, she upbraids him with his faithlessness, which the unconscious hero denies. At the same time she recognizes on his finger the fatal ring, which in their struggle Siegfried had taken from her, and at once concludes who has been her real conqueror. Hagen offers to kill Siegfried, and Gunther, persuaded by Brynhild of Siegfried's breach of trust, assents to the murder of his friend. Siegfried's death

is treated in accordance with the 'Nibelungenlied.' Tired from hunting the knights rest in the forest, and Siegfried tells them the story of his adventures. Gradually old memories rise before him. As his tale approaches his first meeting with the Valkyrie the veil is torn asunder, and when Hagen thrusts his spear into Siegfried's back the hero's last thought is Brynhild.

In the final scene Brynhild asserts her right to the dead hand of him whose love, though passingly estranged by witchcraft, in reality remained her own. Him she will join in his grave. Mounting her horse, she rushes into the midst of the burning pyre. The ring from Siegfried's finger she restores to the Rhine-daughters, who approach on the rising waves of the river. A bright gleam on the horizon announces at the same time the flaming destruction of Walhall and its divine inmates. Thus the gods perish, but the powers of darkness also are baffled. For the curse of the ring is broken and a new reign has begun—the reign of free heroic impulse, no longer fettered by conventional order or allured by the baneful desire of gold. And here again we meet with the idea of the world-redeeming power of woman's all-sacrificing love, so frequently found in Wagner's creations. For it is Brynhild's voluntary death which finally breaks the fetters of mankind, and ushers in the era of freedom and beautiful human development. The musical treatment of this scene is a marvel of polyphonous boldness. It in a manner recapitulates and concentrates in one point the mighty ideas pervading the whole trilogy. We once more hear the representative melodies of desire and hatred, of

despair and tenderest affection, which have become familiar to us. But loudest and mightiest of all resounds the Walhall-motive, surrounded on all sides by the mounting flames of Loge, in which a divine world finds its bright-burning grave. When its last remnants are consumed by the fire a suave melody resounds, the gently rising notes of which suggest those words which should be written as a motto on the whole grand work—the words : *omnia vincit amor*.

The performance at Baireuth before an international and representative audience was, in many respects, an event of unique importance; especially the orchestra under the leadership of the greatest living conductor. Hans Richter did wonders. Fire and precision appeared combined with the utmost delicacy, and Wagner's most determined adversaries had to admit that the charge of noisiness raised against him, as it was in former days against Mozart and Beethoven, is entirely groundless. The *ensemble* of the performance on the stage also was beyond all praise. Although the vocal powers of some of the singers showed the deficiencies of the German school, Mdme. Materna (Brynhild) and Herr Vogel (Loge) were generally acknowledged to be artists of the first order.

After this triumphant climax of his career, Wagner's life may be summed up in a few sentences. He has taken up his permanent abode at Baireuth. But in spite of the inscription on his house the desire for work and for fame and for motion has not yet relinquished him. The gift of the Norn is at work in the more than sexagenarian as it was in the boy.

In May 1877 Wagner paid a visit to this country, and, assisted by Herr Richter, conducted a series of concerts at the Albert Hall. He was received with universal enthusiasm, tending no doubt to efface from his mind the unfavourable impression of his first stay in England. At present Wagner is engaged in the composition of a new opera, 'Parsifal,' the libretto of which has already been published. In Wagner's works the union of music and poetry is too close to allow of a discussion of the book in its separate condition. Suffice it to say, that the subject is taken from the cycle of St. Graal myths, to which 'Lohengrin' also belongs. The performance is to take place at Baireuth in 1882.

LIST OF WAGNER'S PUBLISHED WORKS.

I. OPERAS.

- Rienzi, der letzte der Tribunen. First performed under Wagner, 1842, Dresden. (In England, 1879.)
- Der fliegende Holländer. First performed under Wagner, 1843, Dresden. (In England, 1870.)
- Tannhäuser. First performed under Wagner, 1845, Dresden. (In England, 1876.)
- Lohengrin. First performed under Liszt, 1850, Weimar. (In England, 1875.)
- Tristan und Isolde. First performed under Bülow, 1865, Munich.
- Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. First performed under Bülow, 1868, Munich.
- Der Ring des Nibelungen. Ein Bühnenfestspiel :
Das Rheingold. First performed 1869, Munich.
Die Walküre. First performed 1870, Munich.
Siegfried.
Götterdämmerung.
- The entire work first performed under Hans Richter, at Baireuth, 1876.

II. CHORAL WORKS.

- An Weber's Grabe. Dresden, 1844, on occasion of the burial of Weber's remains, brought back from London.
- Das Liebesmahl der Apostel. Eine Biblische Scene. (Dresden, 1847.)

III. ORCHESTRAL WORKS.

- Eine Faustouvertüre. (1839.)

Huldigungsmarsch. (1869.)
Kaisermarsch. (1871.)
Centennial march for Philadelphia. (1876.)
A Siegfried Idyl. (1871.)

IV. SONGS.

Les deux Grénadiers. (Paris, 1839.)
Dors mon Enfant. (Paris, 1839.)
Mignonne: (Paris, 1839.)
Attente. (Paris, 1839.)
Fünf Gedichte. (1860.)
1. Der Engel. 2. Stehe still. 3. Im Treibhaus. 4.
Schmerzen. 5. Träume.
Der Tannenbaum. (1865.)

V. PIANOFORTE PIECES.

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2. Ein Ende in Paris.
3. Ein glücklicher Abend.
4. Ueber deutsches Musikwesen.
5. Der Virtuos und der Künstler.
6. Der Künstler und die Oeffentlichkeit.
7. Rossini's Stabat Mater.

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2. Le Freischütz. Bericht nach Deutschland.

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Von Halévy.

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Rede an Weber's letzter Ruhestätte.

Gesang nach der Bestattung.

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